SHORT STORIES

argosy

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Isak Dinesen
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ARGOSY

A Fleetway magazine

Vol. XXII No. 2 **FEBRUARY 1961**

Post Bag . . . *Decorations by Graham* **4**

The Bike . . . . . **Alan Sillitoe** **7**
© *Alan Sillitoe 1959*

Socksy Boy . . . . . **Joan Aiken** **14**
Illustrations by Ian Garrard

The Evil That Men Do . . . **R. F. Darrington** . . . **25**

The Wood or the Trees? **35**

Fireside Flourish . . *Decoration by Haro* **36**
"Love Pagan," by A. S. Cripps from "Poems," by permission of Basil Blackwell; "Camp Fire Blues," by courtesy of William Heinemann; "Fireside Tale," by permission of Macmillan and Company; "Wading in Firelight," by courtesy of Faber and Faber; the Nancy Mitford excerpt by permission of Hamish Hamilton; the W. B. Yeats poem by courtesy of Mrs. W. B. Yeats and Macmillan and Company

Greatest Dinner Ever . . . **G. K. Menon** **39**
Illustration by Porter-G

Venetian Shadow . . . . . **Brian Cleeve** **48**
Illustration by F. Griffin
The excerpt from James Morris' "Venice," by permission of Faber and Faber

The Old Adam . . . . . **Rhys Davies** **63**
The excerpt from "Groucho and Me," by courtesy of Victor Gollancz

Barua a Soldani . . . . . **Isak Dinesen** **80**
From "Shadows on the Grass," published by Michael Joseph

When the Wind Blows . *Decorations by Biro* **90**
The poem by Alfred Noyes by permission of John Murray from "Collected Poems;" "It's an Ill Wind," by courtesy of Jonathan Cape; "Zephyr," from "Poems Selected by Himself," by permission of Penguin Books; "Tranquil Breeze," from "Poems from the Persian," by courtesy of the Author

Double or Quit . . . . . **Hugh B. Cave** **93**

A Mess of Porridge . *Decoration by Roy Berry* **106**
"Heave Ho," by permission of Longmans, Green and Company; "With Love and Squalor," by courtesy of Jonathan Cape

Shooting a Line . . . . . **Leslie Gordon Barnard** . **109**

The Sands of Kalahari (Second Part) . . **William Mulvihill** . . . **112**
Illustration by Seabright

Argosy Crossword **144**

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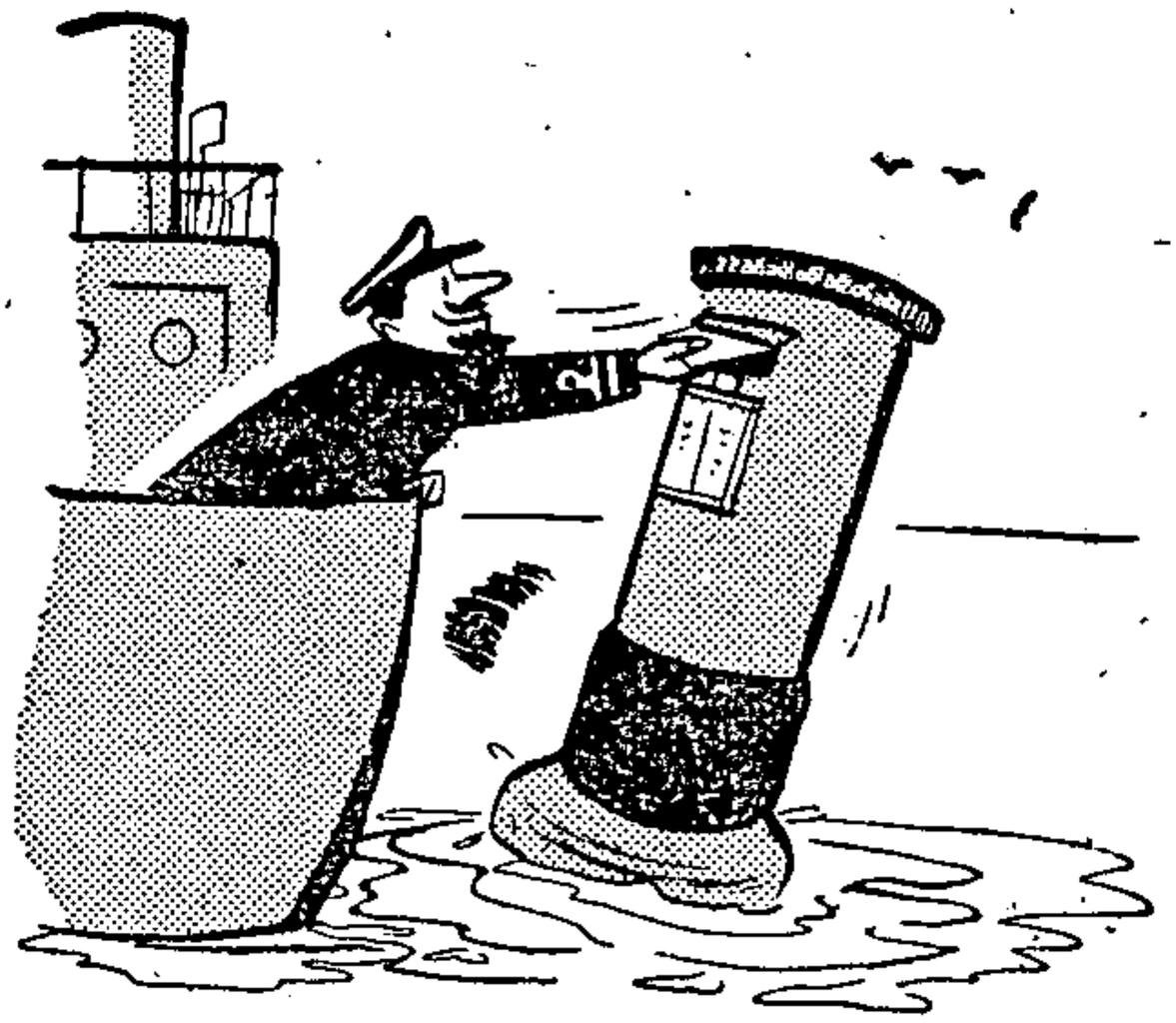


POST BAG

Dear Argosy . . .

We're three of the last of the swaggies in Australia's outback. We reckon Argosy's a dinkum read, and an okay size for stuffing in a tuckerbag, but Mister Editor, WHY no pin-ups? Some nice big technicolour lovelies are what you need in an otherwise grand little book. We've complained ten times but it's a fair cow the way you never answer us, Mister Editor.

George Byers, Ron Marley, Les Kahn, *Alice Springs*

Maybe you forgot to post those letters, cobbers? We can assure you they never reached here. And we're sorry about the pin-ups, but alas we don't have colour reproduction, and say what you like, black-and-white pin-ups are NOT the same. Anyway, where would you pin the pin-ups? On the coolibah tree?—Ed.

Square Peg

I'm a broken-hearted teenager (male) and I work in a record shop. I dug that story by John Wain in your January number. It was good, like, it was on the beam. Man, can that Wain write. I don't generally dig Argosy like up to now I thought it was pretty weedy but when my chick stood me up I thought I'd give it a try. Funny thing, it really took me. Nothing about teenagers, not much about love, but, dad, it's got something. I've swapped my electric guitar and my winkle-pickers for two years' back numbers.

Rod Cabot, *Balham*

We fear your friends will call you a weirdie, Rod, but you stick to Argosy. After all you won't be a teenager for ever, man. Got to think ahead.—Ed.

Snippet Off

Do for pete's sake get rid of all those horrible little snippets of this and that which you intersperse between stories, which seem lacking in beginning or end and utterly pointless.

Tim Harvey, *Salisbury, S. Rhodesia*

That's as may be, Mr. Harvey, but see what Mr. Finn-Hall has to say.—Ed.

. . . I always turn first to your pocket-size anthologies which are small masterpieces of wit and ingenuity. More of them, please. For some time it has been my ambition to produce one of these for Argosy. What about it?

Do you accept outside contributions?

Andrew Finn-Hall, *Menton*

Yes we do, Mr. Finn-Hall, but they aren't all that easy to compile unless you have a good library to hand. Hope we'll be hearing from you.—Ed.

Cleevage

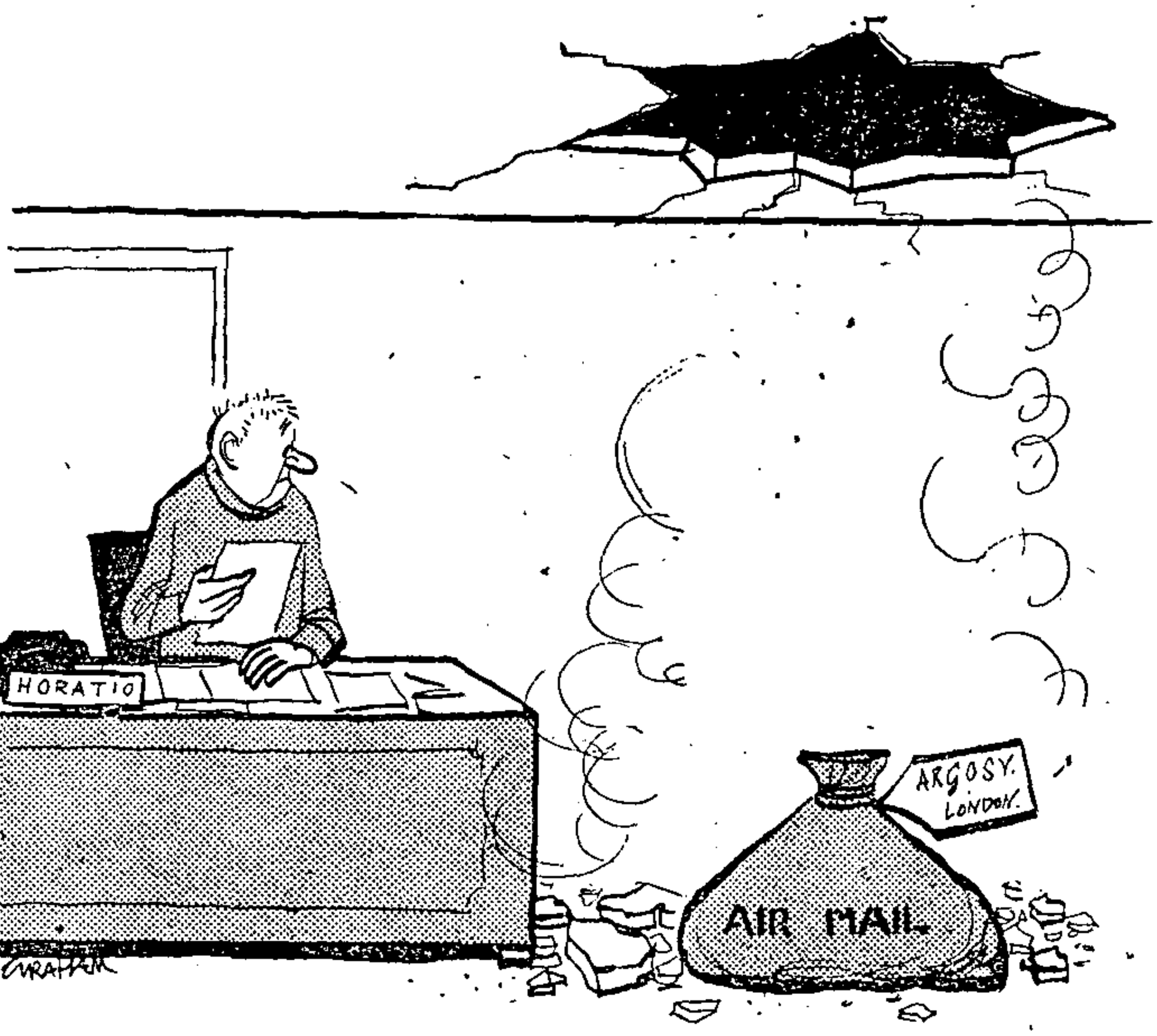
I generally enjoy Brian Cleeve's stories, but I've just been sent a copy of your August 1960 issue (we get things a bit late on Christmas Island.) I turned at once to *Before the Fall*, and WHAT a disappointment! What's happened to Cleeve? No romance, no suspense, no action! Is he off his vitamins? More stories by Cleeve *only* if they're back on form, please.

J. W. Halliday, *Christmas Island*

That was an unusually heart-warming and delightful story! It quite outclassed his usual enjoyable but rather swashbuckling adventure. What a versatile writer Brian Cleeve is.

Rev. J. W. P. Goldsack, *Edgbaston*

Yes, isn't he! We had dozens of letters about this story, all equally emphatic in praise or disapproval. There's another Cleeve story in our October number, which maybe Mr. Halliday has received by now, and one to come in February. We count him one of the most colourful and diversely gifted writers on our list.—Ed.



Adam-ant

You're supposed to be a man's magazine, aren't you? Then why in the name of goodness print all those stories by WOMEN in your pages?

D. E. Dunton, *Bourne End*

Yeah, we're a man's magazine, but in our experience male readers don't want to read nowt but male writers. We aim to purvey the best, irrespective of age or sex.—Ed.

Serial Intake

I'll say one thing for you, your stories read straight along and don't suddenly skip from page 2 to the back, in among the corset ads. But WHY must you havé serials? I can never remember what's happened.

Laurence Mendoza, *Oporto*

What wonderful novels you've serialised! I remember Steinbeck, H. E. Bates, David Walker, Paul Gallico, Stuart Cloete . . . our monthly Argosy brings us a sample of today's foremost writers.

Capt. F. W. Tuppen, *Antofagasta, Chile*

What do other readers feel about serials?—Ed.

ALAN SILLITOE

is thirty-two. Born in Notts, eldest of a large family of brothers and sisters, he told stories to them all from an early age. His first job was in a bike factory and the background to this story is highly authentic. He then served in the R.A.F., was invalided out, and lived for some years in the south of France and Spain on a small R.A.F. pension. He came to England after the big success of his first novel, Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, which won the Authors' Club Award in 1958, and he himself wrote the script for the much-talked-about film which was made from it.

THE BIKE

THE EASTER I was fifteen I sat at the table for supper and Mam said to me, "I'm glad you've left school; now you can go to wok."

"I don't want to go to wok," I said in a big voice.

"Well, you've got to," she said. "I can't afford to keep a pit-prop like yo' on nowt."

I sulked, pushed my toasted cheese away as if it was the worst kind of slop. "I thought I could 'ave a break before startin'."

"Well you thought wrong. You'll be out of 'arm's way at wok." She took my plate and emptied it on John's, my younger brother's, knowing the right way to get me mad.

That's the trouble with me: I'm not clever. I could have bashed our John's face in and snatched it back, except the little bastard had gobbled it up, and Dad was sitting by the fire behind his paper with one tab lifted. "You can't get me out to wok quick enough, can you?" was all I could say at Mam.

Dad chipped in, put down his paper. "Listen: no wok, no grub. So gerrout an' look for a job tomorrer, and don't come back till you've got one."

Going to the bike factory to ask for a job meant getting up early, just as if I was back at school; there didn't seem any point in getting older. My old man was a good worker though, and I knew in my bones and brains that I took after him. At

the school garden the teacher used to say, "Colin, you're the best worker I've got, and you'll get on when you leave"—after I'd spent a couple of hours digging spuds out while all the others had been larking about trying to run each other over with the lawnrollers. Then the teacher would sell the spuds off at threepence a pound and what did I get out of it? Bogger-all. Yet I liked the work because it wore me out; and I always feel pretty good when I'm worn out.

I knew you had to go to work though, and that rough work was best. I saw a picture once about a revolution in Russia, about the workers taking over everything—like Dad wants to—and they lined everybody up and made them hold their hands out and the working blokes went up and down looking at them. Anybody whose hands was lily-white was taken away and shot. The others was O.K.

Well, if ever that happened *I'd* be O.K., and that made me feel better when a few days later I was walking down the street in overalls at half past seven in the morning with the rest of them. One side of my face felt lively and interested in what I was in for, but the other side was crooked and sorry for itself, so that a neighbour got a front view of my whole clock and called with a wide laugh—a gap I'd liked to have seen a few inches lower down in her neck, "Ne' mind, Colin, it ain't all that bad."

The man on the gate took me to the turnery. The noise hit me like a boxing-glove as I went in, but I kept on walking straight into it without flinching, feeling it reach right into my guts as if to wrench them out and use them as garters. I was handed over to the foreman; then the foreman passed me on to the toolsetter; and the toolsetter took me to another youth—so that I began to feel like a hot wallet.

The youth led me to a cupboard, opened it, and gave me a sweeping-brush. "Yo' do that gangway," he said, "and I'll do this one."

My gangway was wider, but I didn't bother to mention it. "Mike," he said, holding out his hand, "that's me. I go on a machine next week, a drill."

"How long you bin on this sweeping?" I wanted to know, bored already.

"Three months. Every lad gets put on sweeping first, just to get 'em used to the place." Mike was small and thin, older than me. We took to each other. He had round bright eyes and dark wavy hair, and spoke in a quick way as if he'd stayed at school longer than he had.

He was idle, and I thought him sharp and clever, maybe because his mam and dad had died when he was three. He'd

been brought up by an asthmatic auntie who'd not only spoilt him but let him run wild as well, he told me later when we sat sipping from our tea-mugs. He'd quietened down now though, and butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, he said with a wink.

I couldn't think why this was after all his stories about him being a mad-head—which put me off him at first, though after a bit he was my mate, and that was that.

We was talking one day, and Mike said the thing he wanted to buy most in the world was a gram and lots of jazz records—New Orleans style. He was saving up and had already got ten quid.

"Me," I said, "I want a bike, to get out at weekends up Trent. A shop on Arkwright Street sells good uns second'and."

I went back to my sweeping. It was a fact I'd always wanted a bike. Speed gave me a thrill. Malcolm Campbell was my bigshot—but I'd settle for a two-wheeled pushbike. I'd once borrowed my cousin's and gone down Balloon House Hill so quick I passed a bus.

I'd often thought how easy it would be to pinch a bike: look in a shop window until a bloke leaves his bike to go into the same shop, then nip in just before him and ask for something you knew they hadn't got; then walk out whistling to the bike at the kerb and ride off as if it's yours while the bloke's still in the shop.

I'd brood for hours: fly home on it, enamel it, file off the numbers, turn the handlebars round, change the pedals, take lamps off or put them on . . . only no, I thought, I'll be honest and save up for one when I get forced out to work, worse luck.

But work turned out to be a better life than school. I kept as hard at it as I could, and got on well with the blokes because I used to spout about how rotten the wages was and how hard the bosses slaved us—which made me popular you can bet. Like my old man always says, I tole 'em, "At 'ome, when you've got a headache, mash; at work, when you've got a headache, strike." Which brought a good few laughs.

Mike was put on his drill, and one Friday while he was cleaning it down I stood waiting to cart his rammel off. "Are you still saving up for a bike then?" he asked me, pushing steel dust away with a handbrush.

"Course I am. But I'm a way off getting one yet. They rush you a fiver at that shop. Guaranteed though."

He worked on for a minute or two; then, without turning, said, as if he'd got a birthday present or was trying to spring a

good surprise on me, " I've made up my mind to sell *my* bike."

" I didn't know you'd got one," I said.

" Well—" a look on his face as if there was a good few things I didn't know—" bus it to wok: it's easier." Then in a pallier voice, " I got it last Christmas from my auntie. But I want a record player now."

My heart was bumping. I knew I hadn't got enough but, " How much do you want for it? "

He smiled. " It ain't how much I want for the bike, it's how much more dough I need to get the gram and a couple o' discs."

I saw Trent Valley spread out below me from the top of Carlton Hill—fields and villages, and the river like a white silk scarf dropped from a giant's neck. " How much do you need then? "

He took his time about it, as if still having to reckon it up. " Fifty bob."

I'd only got two quid—so the giant snatched his scarf away and vanished.

Then Mike seemed in a hurry to finish the deal. " Look, I don't want to mess about, I'll let it go for two pounds five. You can borrow the other five bob."

" I'll do it then," I said.

And Mike shook my hand like he was going away to the army. " It's a deal. Bring the dough in the morning, and I'll bike it to work."

Dad was already in when I got home, filling the kettle at the scullery tap. I don't think he felt safe without there was a kettle on the gas.

" What would you do if the world suddenly ended, Dad? " I once asked when he was in a good mood.

" Mash some tea and watch it," he said. He poured me a cup.

" Lend's five bob, Dad, till Friday."

He slipped the cosy on. " What do *yo'* want to borrow money for? " I told him. " Who from? " he asked.

" My mate at wok."

He passed me the money. " Is it a good un? "

" I ain't seen it yet. He's bringing it in t'morning."

" Mek sure the brakes is safe."

Mike came in half an hour late, so I wasn't able to see the bike till dinnertime. I kept thinking he'd took bad and wouldn't come at all, but suddenly he was stooping at the door to take his clips off—so's I'd know he'd got his—my—bike. He looked paler than usual, as if he'd been up the canal bank all night with a piece of skirt.

I paid him at dinnertime.

"Do you want a receipt for it?" he laughed.

It was no time to lark about: I gave it a short test around the factory, then rode it home.

The next three evenings, for it was well into summer, I rode a dozen miles out into the country, where fresh air smelt like cow-dung and the land was coloured different, was wide open and windier than in streets: marvellous. It was like a new life starting up, as if till then I'd been tied by a mile-long rope round the ankle to home.

Whistling along lanes I planned trips to Skeggy, wondering how many miles I could make in a whole day. If I pedalled like mad, bursting my lungs for fifteen hours I'd reach London where I'd never been: it was like sawing through the bars in clink.

It was a good bike as well, a few years old, but a smart racer with lamps and saddlebag and a pump that went. I thought Mike was a bit loony parting with it at that price, but I supposed that that's how blokes are when they get dead set on a gram and discs. They'd sell their own mother, I thought, enjoying a mad dash down from Canning Circus, weaving between the cars for kicks.

"What's it like having a bike?" Mike asked, stopping to slap me on the back—as jolly as I'd ever seen him, yet in a kind of way that don't happen between pals.

"You should know," I said. "Why? It's all right, ain't it? The wheels are good, aren't they?"

An insulted look came into his eyes.

"You can give it me back if you like. I'll give you your money."

"I don't want it," I said. I could no more part with it than my right arm, and he knew it. "Got the gram yet?"

And he told me about it for the next half hour; it had got so many dials for this-and-that he made it sound like a spaceship. We was both satisfied, which was the main thing.

That same Saturday I went to the barber's for a haircut and when I came out I saw a bloke getting on my bike to ride it away. I tapped him on the shoulder, my fist flashing red for danger.

"Off," I said sharp, ready to smash the thieving bastard.

He turned to me: a funny sort of thief, I couldn't help thinking, a respectable-looking bloke of about forty wearing glasses and shiny shoes, smaller than me, with a moustache. Still, the swivel-eyed sinner was taking my bike.

"I'm boggered if I will," he said in a quiet way, so that I thought he was a bit touched. "It's my bike anyway."

"It bleddy-well ain't," I swore, "and if you don't get off I'll crack you one."

A few people gawked at us. The bloke didn't mess about, and I can understand it now. "Missis," he called, "just go down the road to that copperbox and ask a policeman to come up 'ere will you? This is my bike, and this young bogger nicked it."

I was strong for my age. "You perishin' fibber," I cried, pulling him clean off the bike so's it clattered to the pavement. I picked it up to ride away, but the bloke got me round the waist, and it was more than I could do to take him off up the road as well, even if I wanted to. Which I didn't.

"Fancy robbin' a working man of his bike," somebody called out from the crowd of idle bastards now collected. I could have mowed them down.

But I didn't get a chance. A copper came, and the man was soon flicking out his wallet, showing a bill with the number of the bike on it: proof right enough. But I still thought he'd made a mistake.

"You can tell us all about that at the Guildhall," the copper said to me.

I don't know why—I suppose I want my brains testing—but I stuck to a story that I found the bike dumped at the end of the yard that morning and was on my way to give it in at a copshop, and had called for a haircut first.

I think the magistrate half believed me, because the bloke knew to the minute when it was pinched, and at that time I had a perfect alibi—I was in work, proved by my clocking-in card. I knew some rat who hadn't been in work though when he should have been.

All the same, being found with a pinched bike, I got put on probation, and am still doing it. I hate old Mike's guts for playing a trick like that on me, his mate; but it was lucky for him I hated the coppers more and wouldn't nark on anybody, not even a dog. Dad would have killed me if ever I had, though he didn't need to tell me.

I could only thank God a story came to me as quick as it did; though in one way I still sometimes reckon I was barmy not to have told them how I got that bike.

There's one thing I do know: I'm waiting for Mike to come out of Borstal. He got picked up, the day after I was copped with the bike, for robbing his auntie's gas meter to buy more discs. I've got a big bone to pick with him, because he owes me forty-five bob. I don't care where he gets it—even if he

goes out and robs another meter—but I'll get it out of him, I swear blind I will. I'll pulverise him.

Another thing about him though that makes me laugh is that, if ever there's a revolution and everybody's lined up with their hands out, Mike's will still be lily-white, because he's a bone-idle thieving bastard—and then we'll see how he goes on; because mine won't be lily-white, I can tell you that now. And you never know, I might even be one of the blokes picking 'em out.

SKATERS' WALTZ

O should the gracious fates
  But deign to be propitious;
I strap her fairy skates,
  On furry boots delicious.
Her willing hand I take—
  In spite of Aunt Priscilla—
Then speed I o'er the lake
  With little love Chinchilla.
The warmth of her regard
  I take as sort of token
Although it's freezing hard
  Our social ice is broken!
Coquettish in her furs
  She minds not my Manila
Ah! what a glance is hers
  My little dear Chinchilla!

She'll figure, glide and twirl,
  And worry the officials;
She'll cut out every girl
  As easy as initials!
O I could skate for miles
  Or dance a seguidilla
Cheered by the sunny smiles
  Of little smart Chinchilla!
Had I enough a year
  To find my sweet in sable
To wrap my dainty dear
  In ermine were I able
Had I a longer purse
  A neat suburban villa
For better or for worse
  I'd take my pet Chinchilla.

J. ASHBY-STERRY, *Boudoir Ballads*, 1877

socksy boy

by Joan Aiken

ALASTAIR NESS was a pleasant, straightforward young poet, whose sole aim in life was to write a masterpiece. When this was achieved, and his mission accomplished, he had every intention of swallowing a poison pill—passed on to him by a wartime Secret Service uncle—so as not to clutter the world any longer with his redundant presence; but until he was completely satisfied of the perfection of one of his works he kept the pill in a matchbox in his pocket.

Since poets must eat, he worked as butler to the Duke of Gilsland, a handsome white-haired satyr in reduced circumstances who had long since turned as much as possible of his dukedom into a limited liability company and was enlarging his circumstances as rapidly as possible by the combined means of throwing open his ancestral home to the public and erecting a zoo, a casino, and a waxwork gallery in its grounds.

Unkind fellow-members of the House of Lords had remarked that the Duke would have encouraged his Duchess to perform a Lady Godiva act in the grounds, too, had this been a feasible means of turning a few more halfcrowns, but unfortunately the last Duchess had run off with a mere Viscount, and so the Duke had to content himself with autographing postcards of Whining Court and selling his memoirs to the Sunday Press.

Alastair woke one wintry morning at his usual hour of six to a pitched battle between his conscious and his subconscious; the former remembered that the Duke was returning from the Argentine that day with Duchess number three, while the latter was wildly anxious to begin work on a new ode to be called *English Trauma*.

Conscious reason won; Alastair was about to leap out of bed when an unusual noise arrested him. At first he thought it must

be the plash of the fountain in the inner courtyard, but then he remembered that was temporarily turned off, awaiting a supply of Spanish burgundy suitable for celebrating the Duke's home-coming.

After a moment he identified the sound as a purr. But what a purr! If all the cats in the Court revved up before an amplifier they could produce nothing on this scale.

Momentarily unnerved, Alastair drew the sheet over his head. But then he undrew it again. A nineteenth-century housekeeper had embroidered a coronet surmounting a *U* on all the upper sheets, and a strawberry-leaf with an *L* on the lower ones. During his first irritated and homesick weeks at Whining Alastair had added a *Non* to all the *U*'s, immensely delighting some of the Duke's guests. The *Non-U* coronet scratched his nose and reminded him that duty called. He sat up and glanced cautiously round the room.

A full-length mirror faced him on the wall opposite his bed. If this seems unusually handsome equipment and bedding for a butler's room, we must explain that at Whining the servants, of whom there were very few, slept on the third, or inferior-guest, storey.

In the mirror he saw, with horrified fascination, that something was stirring under his bed, bumping against the valance. Presently a large fluffy paw, orange with black stripes, thrust out, explored tentatively, found Alastair's leather slipper, swatted it cajolingly once or twice, then extended claws three inches long and hooked it back under the bed. The purring, which had stopped for a moment, recommenced even louder than before.

Alastair was fond of animals. It had been fear of the supernatural that had unmanned him. He had expected to see the Whining Lady, a ghost who appeared on the fountain in her nightwear at moments of doom or stress. Now he knew it was only a tiger cub under his bed—escaped from the Duke's zoo, no doubt—he was quite reassured.

Without getting out, he flipped the valance up, dangled a hand down, snapped his fingers encouragingly, and said, "Here, boy! Hey, puss? Come on out of there, Fur!"

The purring trebled in volume and a tongue like a piece of warm, wet, flexible sandpaper lavished itself all up and down his arm. Whiskers vibrated. He wriggled his fingers, scratching a square furry cheek and the base of a large velvet ear.

So far so good. But there was a shock in store for Alastair.

He jumped out of bed, and with a swish the tiger—shy, evidently—retired backwards out of sight. Alastair stooped to retrieve his slipper—and saw no tiger under the bed. When he reached for the slipper his hand encountered fur and whisker: but invisible fur and whiskers that could merely be felt, not seen.

Happening to glance the other way into the mirror, Alastair plainly saw the reflection of a large tiger cub under his bed, lying on its side in a provocative attitude and gnawing his slipper.

He said, "This is a fine state of affairs. You've lost your looks! What have you done with yourself, Henry?"

Henry purred. A tearing sound suggested that he was sharpening his claws on the carpet.

Perhaps he's hungry, Alastair thought, pulling on his trousers. Perhaps some food will put him right. In a way it's a good thing he's invisible, for the time being; it'll save alarming Mrs. Boddity.

Mrs. Boddity, the cook, was the sole remaining retinue, besides Alastair and a char, that the Duke's straitened means and parsimony allowed.

Arrived at the kitchen with Henry doing an invisible cha-cha, all purr and fur, round his ankles, Alastair was relieved to find Mrs. Boddity retired into a stone-deaf spell, brought on by her annoyance at the thought of the Duke's imminent return with a new Duchess.

Alastair opened the door of the deep-freeze. One of his less enjoyable duties was dragging the Whining River with a seine net, gutting the resultant ton or so of grey mullet, and putting them up for frugal ducal dinners. The chest contained enough mullet to supply a hundred tigers' breakfasts, and Henry's purr resounded like an organ solo in the Albert Hall.

There was little leisure after breakfast. Beds had to be made, rooms turned out, grouse unfrozen, and the supply of Rioja had to be tapped and piped to the fountain in the inner court.

"And what's the betting her new Grace wouldn't sooner have Coca-Cola?" grumbled Cawdkin the gardener, called from his borders to help. "She's only twenty, bain't she?"

"I daresay she has Spanish tastes, coming from Buenos Aires," argued Alastair, directing the wine-flow into a watering-can in order to taste it and make sure it was not corked. He scuffled sideways with his foot to erase a large damp pug-print on a paving-stone. Henry, who had followed him affectionately all day, was having an invisible game with the splashes of the fountain.

By this time Alastair had become so attached to Henry's company that he had abandoned the idea of returning him to captivity. He shut the tiger in his bedroom with a thawed-out grouse just before the Duke's arrival and then, to satisfy his curiosity, nipped over to the zoo.

In the empty compartment next to the Abominable Snowman he discovered a notice:

TEMPLE TIGERS OF MYAUNG PIR PAU
These tigers, bred by priests to guard the sacred shrines, are invisible to the naked eye but can be seen in mirrors. Coroneted pocket mirrors are on sale at the turnstile, price 7/6

The Duke didn't miss a trick.

Alastair had a polished cigarette case and in its surface he was able to catch the reflection of a fine mother tiger and some three-quarter-grown cubs.

"How many cubs are there?" he asked Mildew, the zoo keeper.

"Well, sir, we've never been certain. I was off duty the night she kittened, and she managed to sneak past my assistant and get out for a couple of hours. We've a notion that one or two cubs may have escaped but it's hard to be sure. No one's complained yet, but of course they are man-eaters, so it's a little worrying. . ."

The sound of cheering from the dutiful tenantry warned

Alastair that the Duke had come in sight. He thanked Mildew and dashed back to his post.

As the coroneted Cadillac slowed to a halt and its door opened Alastair received his second shock of the day. He fell in love.

Anita, her Grace the ninth Duke's third Duchess, was not at all the flashing black-haired Latin-American beauty he had pictured. She was small and unassuming, and her hair was a soft mouse-brown. But she seemed far from shy. When Alastair bowed she gave him a long, slow, amused look out of eyes almost as huge and green as Henry's mirrored ones.

"I've read some of your poetry," she said. "I'm sure we shall be friends."

She had a charming slight accent which Alastair, picking up the suitcases bemusedly, could not define, other than, vaguely, as colonial.

"Come come, my dear," said the Duke bluffly, "just because it pleases my ducal fancy to have the poetical feller in my pantry doesn't mean he's to be encouraged; there's no time for that kind of thing at Whining. You run and tidy yourself, and then you can autograph postcards in the waxwork gallery for half an hour before tea. I want to go into the Casino takings with Bellairs." And the Duke hustled off, shouting to Alastair as he went that someone had scamped dusting the antlers.

Alastair carried up her Grace's cases. His heart was in a turmoil. Temporarily abandoning *English Trauma*, he began to shape lines of lyric description:

Sage-green, sagacious,
O her eyes, good gracious!
Delicious, tenacious . . .

"You can put 'em there," said her Grace, indicating a spot on the bedroom floor. "Golly, no table-lamp, no bedside rug? And what a mouldy old carpet!"

"His Grace economises in his private apartments," Alastair said somewhat stiffly. Then he burst out—he couldn't help it—"Why, *why* did you marry him?"

Quite unoffended, she regarded him with gravity.

"It wasn't for the money, pal, don't think it. I was in a bit of a spot. My pa had died and the landlord was trying to foreclose me into the Casa Roja; that was the local House of Joy. So becoming a Duchess and autographing a few hundred postcards every day seemed quite an acceptable alternative." She went on looking solemnly at Alastair and added, "You've fallen in love with me, picklepuss, haven't you?"

"Hook, line, and sinker," he groaned. "Does everybody?"

"Poor boy. It's the serious types like you that always seem

to. It's funny, because I'm not so all-fired serious myself. . ."

There was a thunderous crash as the door burst open and something invisibly purring discharged itself into the room. Henry had grown tired of durance among the polished grouse-bones.

"What in tarnation is that?" exclaimed the Duchess.

"It's my tiger," Alastair explained hastily. He had intended not to mention Henry's presence to a living soul, but the Duchess had a way of upsetting people's resolutions. "He's invisible, but you can see him in the mirror if you look."

Anita turned to the mirror and her green eyes widened in delight.

"Oh, *Socksy boy!*" She dropped to her knees in the middle of the carpet and hugged Henry, who rubbed his huge striped invisible head against her.

Alastair was distressed to see that there were tears in her eyes.

"I feel a whole heap better now," she said presently, and stood up. "Oh, by the way, while I think of it, honeybunch, would you make up separate beds for Eadred and me. Separate," she repeated firmly, eyeing the ducal fourposter with ill-concealed distaste.

Alastair nodded, gulped, and tugged Henry after him out of the room.

Keeping Henry's presence concealed during the next few weeks presented Alastair with something of a problem.

He found it anxious work presiding at tenants' teas and dinners for the White Hunters' Circle, of which his Grace was chairman. He needed to be permanently braced into a state of preparedness for the hefty, furry thud of Henry's weight against his legs. There seemed to be no way of keeping the tiger shut in; the lock of Alastair's door had long since collapsed, and the supply of grouse and grey mullet was running low. Alastair had been obliged to ask for electric fans in the kitchen and dining-room to drown the sound of Henry's thunderous purr, and several times the Duchess had nearly precipitated a crisis by running down the long vaulted corridor to the servants' quarters calling, "Where's my Socksy boy?"

The Duchess was not settling well. Although she dutifully signed her name five hundred times a day she looked peaked and pale, shivered in the draughts, and turned from the porridge and grey mullet with aversion. Alastair and Henry were her only friends, and this at some risk.

Alastair dreaded to think what would happen if his pet's

existence was discovered by the Duke, who had been in a particularly sadistic and unamiable temper since his return, twitting Alastair about poetry in front of the White Hunters, and making unpleasant remarks at Anita's expense. Relations between the Duke and Duchess seemed to have deteriorated with alarming rapidity.

Handing cocktails one day Alastair heard the tail-end of a dispute: "I'll give you till the end of the winter tourist season—no longer. For one reason only—because I want you to dress up as the Whining Lady on Connoisseurs' Days—the first Wednesday in each month. But after that there's to be no more nonsense. I need an heir."

"Fair enough," Anita said, but she said it faintly. Henry, who had accompanied Alastair and the cocktail tray, rubbed against her ankles and she scratched his head for comfort and whispered, "Who's my beautiful Socksy boy?"

Alastair hastily escaped from the room. In due course the tiger followed him. His tail was damp, as if someone had borrowed it to wipe away a few surreptitious tears.

Alastair's troubles were not helped by the fact that he was dying for love of Anita. Sometimes, in insane moments of hope, prompted by occasional troubled glances from her grass-green eyes, he was tempted to believe that she reciprocated his feelings.

Henry brought this tension-fraught state of affairs to a crisis one tempestuous Tuesday evening. He hated snow, and had refused to take his usual exercise gallop on the winter-white lawn; consequently he was in a destructive and fidgety mood, and had several times sent Alastair's heart into his patent-leather shoes during the dinner party for the local gentry by letting out loud, bored, whining yawns, which could only be drowned by much clashing of the coroneted silver dinnerware.

Later, while Alastair was pouring brandy, an appalling crash suggested that Henry had climbed into the service lift and sent it hurtling to the bottom of the shaft; which proved to be the case. Mercifully the Duke was demonstrating his hi-fi at that particular moment and noticed nothing, but a glint in Anita's eye showed that she guessed the truth.

Alastair rushed off to inspect the damage as soon as he could get away. Henry seemed to be unhurt. He was sitting and growling among the wreckage, shaking his whiskers to free them from crême caramel. Alastair cuffed his head, not ungently, to show that he was in disgrace, and Henry turned and bit him.

As tiger-bites go, it was a mild one, but deep enough to draw blood. A moment later Alastair, stooping to tidy the mess of plates and cutlery, felt Henry's huge rough tongue licking and

investigating his hurt hand, licking harder and harder—harder and harder—

At this point Anita arrived, finger on lip.

"What happened?" she said. "I sneaked away from all those old fossils to find out. What have you done to your hand, honeybunch?" Then she saw the ruins of the dinner-service and gasped, "Oh, Socksy boy—"

"He needs exercise," said Alastair gloomily.

"Well that's easy to fix, isn't it?"

She whipped off her lamé stole—Anita's dress allowance was charged up to expenses by the thrifty Duke—and wriggled it enticingly along the floor in front of Henry. "Here feller, pretty puss, lovely Socksy boy, chase it then!"

She was off, running along the passage with a flicker of silver stilettos and a flash of sage-green satin. Henry launched himself after her like a javelin.

"Stop. Stop!" Alastair shouted in terror. "Anita! Wait! I don't think he's safe."

He bolted after the dangerous pair. Their track was easy to follow. Shreds of lamé and clawed tufts of carpet led along the corridor, up the great staircase, and into the ducal bedroom.

They were playing tag round the fourposter, with a ruinous effect on its curtains. Two chairs, a coroneted footbath, and Anita's camp bed had already been knocked over.

"Anita, you must stop! He's turning savage!" gasped Alastair. "He comes from a man-eating family. I should never have—"

He grabbed the tattered remnant of her stole and snaked it along the floor into the Duke's open wardrobe. A wild displacement of suits and shoes showed that Henry had pounced on it in there. Alastair slammed the door and turned the key.

"Thank heaven for that," he sighed, mopping his forehead. "Once a tiger gets the taste of human blood—"

"But not my beautiful Socksy boy—" protested Anita.

She was standing close to him, her eyes emerald with excitement. The general state of emergency was too much. He snatched her into his arms and kissed her with frantic abandonment.

"Hey, hold your horses, picklepuss, I haven't said—"

"What the devil's going on in here?"

This was from the Duke, come in search of his etchings, which he wanted to show to a neighbour's daughter. He surveyed the scene with total disapproval.

Alastair gulped, and slowly untwined himself from the Duchess. He stood stiffly in front of the Duke.

"I bitterly regret this incident, your Grace," he said with

formality. " My feelings overcame me. I shall of course commit suicide immediately. In the library. The fact that I shall be dying before having achieved my masterpiece is a small price to pay for—for—" He met the Duchess' eyes, swallowed, and faltered to a stop. Pulling out his suicide pill he bowed to both of them and started for the door.

" You'll do nothing of the sort! " growled the Duke, wresting the pill from him. "And leave me without a butler in the middle of the season? Where d'you think I'd find anyone else to come for your wages? You'll stay here and work it out. Besides, this is going to make a good story for the White Hunters' circle. How they'll laugh when I tell them I found the butler kissing m'wife." He himself laughed, unpleasantly. Alastair turned pale.

"And you needn't worry, my dear, there's no risk of its occurring again. A little disciplinary action will soon teach your Grace that it doesn't pay to deceive me. Let's see, it's Connoisseurs' Day tomorrow. We'll have you chained to the fountain all day, my love, wrapped in a sheet, taking the part of the Whining Lady. We can charge an extra seven-and-six for that." He glanced at the scurry of snowflakes against the black windowpane. Alastair started forward with an oath, but the Duke, who had taken down an elephant-gun from the wall, waved him off.

" Back to your pantry, you poetical scum. And as for you, your Grace, I'll just lock you up till I've got rid of the guests."

He seized Anita by the shoulder. Alastair darted recklessly forward but the Duke, whirling the gun, brought the butt down on his skull and felled him to the floor. The gun's orbit took in as well an enormous bottle of Noche Serena perfume—this could not have been put down to expenses but the Duchess had brought it with her from Buenos Aires—which slopped over Alastair and deepened his insensibility. It also, later, saved his life.

Anita screamed. The Duke, with a promptness that suggested considerable practice, picked up a large swansdown powderpuff and rammed it into her mouth, fastening it in position with a nylon scarf, pushed her into the bathroom, and tied her hands to the hot towel-rail. Locking the door on her he smoothed his disordered white hair, straightened the ribbon of a Latin-American decoration in his buttonhole, and opened the wardrobe to find the etchings, which lived in a secret drawer behind his ties.

There were, of course, no witnesses to the scene that followed.

Alastair was still unconscious and Anita was slowly and doggedly beginning to untie her hands by means of her toes. She heard a muffled sound through the bathroom door which suggested that Henry had come out and was playing a protracted game of romps, but she was too busy to pay attention.

When the last knot was undone she tried the door and as it resisted she climbed out of the window. Science has cause to regret this. The spectacle of a Duke being devoured by an invisible tiger is an unusual one, and an eye-witness account would be of value. Unfortunately such an event is not likely to recur.

Anita found it easy enough to clamber down into the inner court, making use of the antlers which were liberally studded over the stonework. She dropped lightly on to the snowy lawn and scowled at the fountain whose pedestal emptily awaited the appearance of the Whining Lady. Then she scowled again, for she could dimly discern a spectral presence shivering in the icy spray and wringing its ghostly hands for the passing of the ninth Duke.

Anita was no believer in the supernatural. Sensibly she turned her back on the phantom and made her way in through the backdoor, past the irascible, deaf mutterings of Mrs. Boddity.

At about this time Alastair staggered weakly to his feet amid wafts of Noche Serena and stared wild-eyed round the Duke's bedroom, which looked as if several hurricanes had hit it in quick succession. He lurched to the bathroom door and unlocked it, but much to his astonishment Anita was not there; a powderpuff and two stockings lay on the floor.

A gorged and contented snoring started up behind him. He soon tracked it to the fourposter, where Henry's presence was marked by a deep depression in the eiderdown.

The Duke was nowhere to be seen.

Alastair breathed deeply in relief. Although Henry had evidently broken loose from the wardrobe he seemed to have settled down without doing mortal damage. Resolving to take him to the zoo first thing next morning, Alastair wound the Duke's dressing-gown cord several times round the tiger's massive throat and persuaded him to flop heavily off the bed and pad along to his own sleeping-quarters. Then, clutching his aching head, Alastair staggered back to tidy up the chaos in the Duke's room.

Here Anita found him, dazedly trying to fit together two halves of a silver-backed hairbrush.

"Honeybunch! Are you all right?"

She ran to him and took his head in her hands.

"Just a bit concussed," said Alastair, embracing her with dreamy fervour.

"Sugarbunkin, you mustn't do that in here! Eadred would kill you if he caught you again."

"He won't," Alastair said with assurance.

"How do you know?"

"I found this." He held out a relic, small but unmistakable, of the late Duke.

"Good gracious! You mean that Henry—"

"Precisely," said Alastair, nodding. "I told you he needed exercise. Tomorrow he must go to the zoo. I only wonder why he didn't finish me off too; while he was at it."

Anita chuckled irrepressibly. "Chiquita, he wouldn't come within a mile of you! It probably made him sneeze to sniff you; you smell like seven seraglios. Where is he now?"

"In my room with a table across the door."

"Then," she said, "you'd better not go back there tonight in case he gets hungry again and the scent has worn off you."

Her eyes roved absently to the camp bed, which Alastair had set up once more on its six tiny feet.

Henry was not destined to end his days in captivity. He had swallowed the Duke with more zeal than discretion, and had ingested Alastair's poison pill along with his Grace. Next morning when they went to find him he was peacefully, invisibly dead.

The mystery of the Duke's disappearance was never solved. After seven years he was presumed dead and the title went to a cousin. Long before that time Anita had moved to a tiny cottage on the estate which, she said, she preferred to Whining Court.

Here one day Alastair came in search of her with a large invisible bundle in his arms. He spread it on the brick floor at her feet, fell on his knees, and said, "This is all I have, apart from five guineas which *New Ideas* have advanced me for my collected poems. It's not as much as a dukedom, but will you take it, Anita? Will you marry me?"

She knelt down beside him, crying, "Oh, it's the last memento of my darling Socksy boy who brought us together! Why; honeybunch, with five guineas and a tigerskin rug we shall be rich! What more would you want to get married on?"

What indeed? Let us leave them together.

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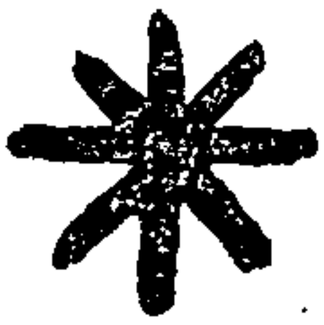
He who rides on a tiger cannot easily dismount.

Chinese Proverb



What is your verdict?

The upshot of this story—an Argosy "first" by a new author—

is something that the reader can decide.

THE EVIL THAT MEN DO

by R. F. DARRINGTON

WHAT do you do when you walk into a pub and see a man, whom you know to be dead, standing by the bar?

If I'd had any sense I should have turned tail and walked straight out again. Not, I suppose, that that would have been any good. The mere sight of him would have started all the memories and speculation. The inevitable meeting would only have been postponed. Having seen him, I should have had to try to find out more.

What I actually did was to order my pint and take it to a corner table. It was quite early in the evening and the room was almost empty. I took a long swig and sat back to look at Bill Deecon; the man who had been my best friend; the man I knew to have been killed sixteen years ago.

He'd aged, of course. There's a hell of a difference between twenty-three and thirty-nine. But sixteen years older or not, he was unmistakably Bill. Dark curly hair—greying a bit now. Broken nose. I remembered the game in which that had happened very well. Bill had come back with it strapped up and scored the winning try. Chin thrust forward in a way which suggested aggressiveness until you noticed that the good-humoured mouth denied it. Even the way in which he leaned on the bar, and held his mug with one large hand underneath it, was a stance that belonged only to Bill.

At this moment, his glance, roving idly round the room, turned

on me. I waited to see recognition dawn. It didn't. His eyes rested on me momentarily, then moved on. If it was Bill, he had schooled himself not to know anyone from the war years—or before—which, considering the circumstances which had preceded his presumed death, was hardly surprising.

I drank some more beer and had second thoughts. Perhaps he genuinely didn't recognise me. It was about a week after he had gone that I had trodden on that damned mine. Considering all things, they had patched me up pretty well, but losing a leg and having scraps of metal distributed about the face presumably changes one's appearance a bit.

His mug was nearly empty. He might leave at any moment. Before he went I had to know.

I finished my beer and walked up to the counter. I stood by his side and asked for a refill. Our eyes met. He smiled—the sort of smile that one gives a stranger in a pub. But it gave me an opening.

"Good evening," I said, "you are Bill Deecon, aren't you?"

He didn't twitch a muscle. Just looked vaguely puzzled and surprised. Absolutely the right reaction to being given the wrong name by a perfect stranger.

"Afraid not," he replied, in Bill's voice. "My name's Whitwell—Harry Whitwell."

I looked at him again. At close quarters the resemblance was more striking than ever. Still, I couldn't accuse him of lying. Perhaps I'd changed more than I thought. Perhaps Bill thought he was denying himself to some comparative stranger from the past. Perhaps a tin leg and facial scars had made me unrecognisable even to Bill, who for years had been closer than a brother. I took the opportunity of telling him my name.

"Sorry," I said, "but you're exactly like him. I'm Peter Coombs. Have another beer."

Nothing connected. If the name meant anything to him, he certainly didn't show it.

He had another beer. We chatted as we drank. He told me that he'd just arrived in Easthampton to take up a teaching job in the local school. I told him I was a solicitor. After this sort of small talk he asked about Bill.

I told him that Bill and I had served together in the Desert and in Italy. I didn't tell him about Bill being arrested. I'd never told anyone that story—not even Susan.

He said he often wished he'd been in the Desert. Thought it must have been the best part of the war. He'd kicked his heels in England until the Normandy landings; then he'd gone through France and up into Germany. Yes—he'd been in the Gunners

too. He glanced at his watch, said he must go, offered me another beer which I refused, said good night and left. His walk as he crossed the room was Bill's, left foot turned out slightly, head back, chin thrust forward.

I sat down again with the remains of my beer and thought about Bill Deecon. I hadn't done this for some years.

Bill and I had first met at school when we were both six. We fought—we both cried—we swore eternal friendship and some-how it stuck.

Bill was always the leader. He was just that little bit more determined—just that little bit more intelligent—just that little bit stronger—than I. We were to go to Cambridge together, but Hitler had other plans and we joined the Army together instead. We arrived in North Africa in time for Alamein: a couple of very raw subalterns. By the time we'd reached the northern half of Italy, Bill was commanding the Battery and I was his second-in-command. I thought I knew him better than any man on earth, which was why it was such a hell of a shock when it happened.

We were preparing for what turned out to be the last big battle of the Italian campaign. By and large there was a lull and Bill had taken the day off to go back to Ancona. We all went back to Ancona when we could—there were some good public baths there.

It was late afternoon when the C.O. sent for me. Regimental H.Q. wasn't far away and I walked across. The Colonel was a nice old boy—at least he seemed old to me then—and when I walked into the cottage which was serving as his office, I was shaken to see how upset he looked. He had reason to be.

Bill had been arrested. Arrested for the particularly brutal and obscene murder of a ten-year-old Italian girl.

When he told me I felt as though a mule had kicked me in the stomach. I began to protest that there must be some mistake. The C.O. stopped me with an abrupt gesture.

"That was my first reaction too, Peter," he said, "but there's no mistake. They took him redhanded." He winced when he realised what he had said.

I remember thinking that I'd never before appreciated the true meaning of the expression.

Even after this interval of time my mind sheered away from the details. I suppose the whole disgusting affair would have had much more publicity but for the lucky accident of the shell hitting the truck which was taking Bill back that evening.

Lucky? Well, lucky for Bill, for the Regiment, and for Bill's friends. Not so lucky for the poor bloody escort and driver who were killed with him.

When he heard about that, the C.O. summoned me again. He knew, of course, that Bill and I had been very close. He told me that he proposed to send the usual letter to Bill's parents. *Killed in action. Deeply regret. Loss of a gallant officer. Etc. etc. etc.* Then he cleared his throat and looked at me straight.

"I believe he was engaged to be married," he said. "I expect you know the girl. I suggest that you write to her along similar lines."

He was. I did. I had been in love with Susan as long as Bill had. But if he had not been killed she would never have married me.

I had never for one moment doubted that Bill had been killed that night. Never, until I had walked into The Chequers this evening.

I bought myself a third pint and settled down to think some more. Susan would be wondering where I was, but I had to sort this out before I faced her.

Suppose Bill had been the sole survivor from the shell which hit the truck. He would know that there was no future for him as Major Bill Deecon. It wouldn't have been difficult at that time to find some Italian peasant's clothes and take to the hills for a bit. Things were pretty chaotic. Bill had spoken Italian fluently.

But surely, when the remains were gathered up it would have been obvious whether there were two bodies or three. Not necessarily, I argued with myself. Blast played some funny tricks. Three men together. Two could be blown to rags and tatters of flesh and the third escape unharmed. Damn it—in 1940 every other Londoner was telling that sort of bomb story.

All right. So Bill hadn't been killed. What then?

That seemed easy. He had lain low until the war was over. Somehow or other he had got back to England. There was, I believe, a brisk trade in stolen and forged papers throughout the Middle East in those days. It wouldn't have been impossible for a determined and desperate man. I knew Bill was determined and I was certain that he was desperate. Then he'd taken up a new life as Harry Whitwell—schoolmaster. Doubtless he'd avoided familiar localities. Doubtless if he ever ran into anyone from his old life he'd put on a similar act to the one he'd given me this evening. After all, only a handful of people who'd known him also knew the circumstances of his death. Colonel Knowles: and he was dead. The Adjutant. Me. A couple of chaps in the Military Police. To the others who knew the facts he was only a name.

At this point I took a pull at myself. Here was I, an experienced

solicitor accustomed to dealing in fact, weaving a whole web of fantasy from a chance meeting with a stranger in a pub. Maybe he did resemble Bill. Everyone is said to have a double somewhere. Nobody could be as good an actor as Bill would have had to be not to betray himself to me.

I drained my glass and went home.

I don't walk as fast as I used to. My tin leg works well enough but it's not built for speed. It took me nearly a quarter of an hour to cover the half mile from The Chequers to my house. During this time I decided that I must tell Susan about Whitwell. After all she might bump into him at any time—he was teaching at the school which my daughters attended—and it would be a hell of a shock if she wasn't prepared.

What with one thing and another I didn't actually tell her until we reached the bedroom. First, I was very late for supper. Then there was a play on TV which she wanted to see. Just as that finished young Caroline had a noisy nightmare and the commotion awakened Pauline. So there was no opportunity for light chit-chat until we were preparing for bed.

She was actually in bed lying back on the pillows, and I was sitting on the edge, unstrapping my tin leg, when I told her. All casual-like.

"By the way, darling," I said, "I've been meaning to tell you all evening. I ran into a bloke in the pub who was the absolute double of old Bill. Couldn't believe my eyes at first. Although I knew he wasn't Bill I had to speak to him, just to make sure. Turned out to be a chap named Whitwell—teaches at the girls' school."

Sue didn't answer for a moment. I forced myself not to look at her. She and I were very happy together but I had never doubted that I was second best.

When she did answer her voice was just a shade too casual—exactly as mine had been.

"Really?" she said. "Was he quite like—or very like?"

"Very like," I replied, as I pulled on my pyjama trousers. "Not like Bill as he was, but Bill as he would have been now—if you follow me."

I fell back into bed. There was a long silence. Then Sue said good night and I switched out the light.

It had been a trying day at the office, and an even more trying evening. By all the rules I should have been dead beat. But no sooner was the light extinguished than my thoughts started to tumble over each other again.

The likeness really was extraordinary. Could two men be

quite so exactly similar? And if Whitwell wasn't Bill—well, did he match him inside as well as out? If so, surely he was the last man in the world to be in daily contact with young children.

Memories of Italy in the first part of 1945 surged over me once more.

When it was over—when the letters had been written and the formalities completed—Colonel Knowles and I had mentioned the matter only once. It was the evening before the Po battle was due to begin. That we both knew. What we didn't know was that before morning the Colonel would be dead and I should be on my way to hospital minus one leg and a great deal of blood.

I'd slipped over to R.H.Q. before starting off for the O.P. The O.P. that I never reached—a Shu mine got in the way.

The C.O. poured out a couple of large whiskies. He was silent—unusually so. Suddenly he turned to me with the gesture of a man who has reached a decision.

" I've been wondering whether to tell you or not, Peter," he said, " but, all in all, I think you ought to know. This ghastly business about Bill: I'm afraid it wasn't the first time . . . Apparently the Redcaps have been investigating right up Italy. God only knows if it was happening in Africa as well. Probably not—there weren't a lot of kids knocking about the Desert. But the Major who dealt with Bill's case told me that there were some ugly rumours in Cairo a few years back."

I didn't say anything. There didn't seem anything I could say.

The old man went on. Obviously the thing was on his mind and he wanted to share it with someone. He'd thought a lot of Bill. Most people in the Regiment had. The C.O. prided himself, not without justice, on being able to sum people up. Now, here was a case of an officer who was believed by everyone to be not only a first-class soldier, but also a first-class man, turning out to be a perverted maniac.

" It's shaken me, Peter," he said, " shaken me to the core. I feel that I shall never be able to believe in anyone again. I shall always be wondering what particular devil lurks inside the decent bloke that I see."

I still didn't say anything. I was thinking the same thing. Perhaps Knowles was wondering if I had shared Bill's sadistic lust. I swallowed my drink and stood up, made my excuses and went back to the Battery. As I have said, I never saw Knowles again. Within a few hours I was to end my active military life by putting my foot in the wrong place. I heard, very much later, that during the same night the C.O. took a piece of shrapnel in the forehead and died as he fell.

I wished now, as I had wished then, that he hadn't told me.

Bill and I had been very close and I would have preferred to have remembered him as the man I knew who had given way once—perhaps because of the strain of war—to a filthy and bestial impulse. As it was he had to be a creature who had made a habit of such foulness: a creature who could wash the blood off his hands and come back, satiated, to laugh and talk with me and his other friends.

Which brought me back to Whitwell. If he *was* Bill, then clearly he should not be allowed to carry on in any job which brought him into contact with girl children. And even if he was not—how deep did the resemblance go? I had heard of a belief that people who resembled each other physically usually possessed similar tastes, beliefs, habits. Similar vices. Was there any foundation for this or was it pure theory?

At this point I fell into a troubled sleep . . .

Nothing much happened for the next two or three days. There was a lot of difficult stuff in the office—my practice was mostly concerned with civil law—and I worked late every evening. I'm afraid I avoided The Chequers.

When I got home on Friday evening, Sue was unusually quiet. Normally, when I was busy she was splendid. She knew that my stump still worried me when I was tired and so she always set herself to take my mind away from business and entertain me with small talk over the evening meal. Small talk was something she was good at. So, when on this occasion she sat in silence, it was obvious that there was something wrong.

I'd been married long enough to know that it was no use hurrying her. When she was ready, she would tell me; not before.

She was ready by the time we reached the coffee. The kids were in bed. I moved across to my chair and tried to relax as she handed me my cup. The toes in the foot I hadn't got were hurting like hell.

"I met Harry Whitwell today," she said quietly. "I went to fetch the girls from school and he was in the playground. It's a good thing you warned me, darling. As it was I stood and gaped. Peter, the resemblance is uncanny. Voice and everything."

"So you spoke to him," I said.

"I had to. First I had to explain why I was standing like a zany, gazing at him. Secondly, I had to hear his voice. He didn't seem to mind. Actually, he remembered his meeting with you, but he'd forgotten your name. We talked for some minutes."

I kept quiet. I thought, Bill or not, he wasn't likely to mind. No man minds being gazed at by a beautiful woman. And Sue is still very beautiful.

"Peter," she went on. Her voice had become very low. "Peter. I suppose there was no doubt that Bill was killed. I mean, you actually saw his body? You never said much about it." She hesitated; then speaking rather quickly, continued, "It isn't possible that he was just wounded badly—badly enough to make him lose his memory?"

I shouldn't have answered her as I did, of course. My only excuse is that my stump was hurting like fifty devils, I was tired and worried, and that I'd never stopped believing, deep down, that Sue had married me out of pity. Never, by word or deed, had she shown it but I had always felt that her attitude had been, "Bill's gone—nothing really matters, so I'll look after his old pal, Peter, for him."

None of that was any excuse really for my chucking the coffee cup across the room, pulling myself to my feet and snarling, "Of course he was killed. Do you think I invented the whole thing so that I could marry you? Well, I bloody well didn't, although I know as I've always known that you would never have looked twice at me—even as a whole man, let alone a damned cripple—if Bill had come home."

And with that I stumped out of the room and out of the house.

I don't know how far I walked that night. I don't even know where I went. My next memory is of finding myself back again, outside my own front door, nearly three hours later. I was no longer angry. Just worn out and thoroughly ashamed of myself.

Sue was sitting in the same chair. She'd cleaned up the mess and put on a housecoat. She gave me a little smile.

I stood in the doorway and felt an utter swine.

"I'm sorry, Sue," I said, "I don't know what got into me."

"It's all right, Peter," she replied, "let's forget it, shall we? I expect we're both ready for bed."

And that, for the time being, was that. I fell into bed and slept the sleep of complete exhaustion.

We both slept late next day. Caroline, who is ten and capable, brought us a cup of tea about eight-thirty. I never went to the office on Saturday, no matter how busy I was. I needed the weekends.

Sue took the girls and the car to the shops. I pottered about the house and tried to forget Bill, Whitwell, and my behaviour of the previous evening. I wasn't successful.

When they returned Sue was looking disturbed. Oh, God! I thought. Surely she hasn't run into Whitwell again.

She hadn't. What she had run into was news of a murder. A little girl had been brutally killed and maltreated in an alley in the poorer part of the town.

She was apparently the child of feckless parents. They had left her in the charge of a slightly older sister on the previous evening, while they visited the local. Both children had taken advantage of their absence to wander out into the dark streets. There they had separated. The elder had eventually returned home. The younger would never return.

For some days now I had been a worried man. But these previous doubts and anxieties were as nothing compared with those which now beset me. A child had been brutally done to death. I knew that in the town there was living the double of a man who had been proved to have committed several identical crimes—if not that man himself. But other than suspicion I knew nothing to connect Whitwell with this murder.

Naturally enough I was acquainted with most of the Easthampton Police Force. They were, as a whole, reliable and reasonably intelligent. But, like most policemen they were not given to flights of fancy and imagination. They would be disinclined to give a sympathetic hearing to a tale of physical resemblance.

Supposing I went to them and said that Whitwell bore a marked likeness to a man who was killed in action, but who, before his death, had been guilty of similar crimes. After all, there was no need to mention Bill's name. But Easthampton is a small town and, as in all small towns, gossip is rife. Sooner or later, the information which I gave was bound to leak out. Sooner or later Sue would hear of it: then I should be forced to tell her the truth about Bill. Tell her that the man she had loved—the man whose memory she still adored and revered—was a sadistic and perverted murderer.

I argued this out with myself over and over again during the weekend. If only there had been someone with whom I could have talked it over it might have been better. However, since I was smashed up I haven't been much of a social animal. I had dozens of acquaintances in Easthampton, but not one close friend. Sue was the only one. She was the person to whom I had taken all my worries for the past twelve years. Now I had a load which I couldn't share with her and I was utterly lost.

The immediate consequence was that I became more and more bad-tempered. As was usual when I was worried my stump played merry hell. So, all in all, by Sunday evening I wasn't fit to go within a hundred yards of any human being.

Sue and the girls kept out of my way as much as possible, but the weekend must have been nearly as intolerable for them as it was for me.

I suppose the explosion had to come sooner or later. It turned

out to be later; after supper on Sunday, to be exact. Once more the kids were in bed. Sue—poor Sue—tried to do it tactfully.

"You've had a bad weekend, darling," she said. "Is it just the leg—or is there something else as well?"

I, of course, was as touchy as nitro-glycerine.

"Just the leg!" I growled. "It's all very well for you to say *just* the leg. You don't have it to put up with all the time. Don't have to endure hobbling about with everyone feeling sorry for you. Or perhaps you do. You are as deserving of sympathy as I am. It can't be any fun being tied to a cripple whom you married on the rebound; out of pity."

Sue's patience snapped at last.

"Peter, don't be such a fool." She was sitting very upright in her chair. "It's high time you rid yourself of all this nonsense. Can you possibly imagine, after all these years, that I don't love you? It's more than time, too, that you shed this self-pity that you indulge yourself with. Other men have lost limbs and worse—"

As on the earlier evening my self control went with a bang. I pulled myself to my feet and again stumped out of the room. Only my exit line was different.

This time I shouted that if she felt like that I'd take myself away from her.

Again I wandered out into the darkness and walked—and walked—and walked. But this time I didn't find myself back at my own front door.

This time I came out of my blackout to find a torch being shone in my eyes and to hear a gruff voice say, "I'm damned if it ain't Mr. Coombs."

Another voice behind the light replied, "Whoever it is he'll have to give a full account of his movements. Two kids in three nights is over the odds."

Memory—horror—fear: they all leapt into my mind like conflicting demons.

"Another?" I groaned. "Dear God—not another."

The second voice spoke again.

"I'm afraid we shall have to ask you to come along to the station, Mr. Coombs. We're checking everyone who's out tonight. We won't keep you long; we shall just want a statement saying where you've been for the past two hours."

Which is, of course, exactly what I couldn't give them. I had flung out of the house soon after eight-thirty. I had been picked up about ten o'clock. The second child's body had been found just after nine. Apparently she had only just died.

When I couldn't give any coherent description of how I had

spent the evening, Inspector Barton turned to Friday. The fact that I couldn't say how that evening had been spent either seemed to clinch the matter.

All the evidence is circumstantial, of course. They haven't actually charged me yet—but they put me in hospital and a policeman is never far from me.

The real hell is that even I don't know if I am guilty. Did I, crazy with worry, wander into the streets and, with my mind full of Bill, copy his crimes? Or was it Bill himself, masquerading as Whitwell, driven on by his evil genius? Or was Whitwell truly the man he claimed to be, but carrying Bill's inward devil together with his outward appearance?

Or was it, after all, some other man altogether and is the whole thing a ghastly coincidence?

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THE WOOD OR THE TREES?

Even in the age of plastic we still can't manage entirely without timber, so sharpen your laminated pencil and try your hand at the questions here. Out for a wooden duck?

Solutions are on page 111

1. *Who came whiffling through the tulgey wood?*
2. *In which country will you find:*
   a. A palace called the House in the Wood;
   b. The Bois de Boulogne;
   c. A street called Unter den Linden (and what are Linden anyway)?
3. *What are "wooden walls"?*
4. *Why was it a bad thing for Birnam Wood to come to Dunsinane?*
5. *"When the ash leafs before the oak . . ." Can you complete this quotation?*
6. *Yggdrasil was the Norse name for the tree on which the world pivoted—do you know what kind of tree it was?*
7. *Eurydice, wife of the poet Orpheus, was a tree-nymph. Can you remember what these nymphs were called?*
8. *Of which tree is turpentine the juice?*
9. *Which tree is supposed to grow faster for being weighted down?*
10. *"From the wood" in reference to wine or cider means what?*
11. *A "wood" is a term used in what sport?*

Fireside Flourish

Hearts with equal love combined
Kindle never-dying fires . . .

THOMAS CAREW

Eye-shine and fire-shine!
How her spoon's heft plies!
While the black pot bubbles,
While the bright fire sighs!
She 'twas brewed the brown beer,
She 'twas ground the meal!
How can I four cattle
Beg or buy or steal?
Twelve months I'll hire me
For a miner's hire—
Take the kicks and curses
Dare the earth-damp's ire.
I will buy four cattle,
Snatch my maid and run,
She shall reap my red grain,
She shall bear my son!

ARTHUR SHEARLY CRIPPS, *Love Pagan*

Camp Fire Blues

The bivouac was the worst imaginable, but Harry found that some of the Portuguese in the brigade had built up a large fire, and bought it from them for a dollar . . . Kincaid told him that acorns were quite palatable if roasted: rather like chestnuts; so West collected a hat-full and they held them over the fire in the lid of somebody's canteen. Juana, munching resolutely, said they tasted very peculiar, and she was glad she was not a pig.

"Nasty?" Harry asked.

"Oh no, not nasty! Just strange."

"My poor sweet!" Harry said, peeling another and popping it into her mouth.

"Why? I am enjoying myself very much, I assure you."

"Oh, Juana, how I love you!" he said unsteadily.

"Good. I love you too."

She fell asleep presently, with her cheek on her hand, one side of her pleasantly warm, the other cold and muddy . . .

Juana awoke in the small hours, roused by cold. She struggled up on her elbow, still half-asleep, and in the grip of a shuddering fit of ague. Harry was lying sound asleep between her and the fire. Juana burst into tears and shook him.

He woke with a start. "Juana? What is it, my heart?"

"You are horrible, and thoughtless, and cruel, and stupid!" . . .

"Oh, my sweet, I'm so sorry!" Harry said remorsefully. "I must have fallen between you and the fire . . ."

GEORGETTE HEYER, *The Spanish Bride*

Fireside Tale

Do not let any woman read this verse!
It is for men, and after them their sons,
And their sons' sons!

The time comes when our hearts sink utterly;
When we remember Deirdre and her tale,
And that her lips are dust . . .

Let all men go apart and mourn together!
No man can ever love her! Not a man
Can dream to be her lover!

Now she is but a story that is told
Beside the fire! No man can ever be
The friend of that poor queen!

JAMES STEPHENS, *Deirdre*

Wading in Firelight

What sleep that was too, lying on a mattress in front of the fire, your body singing with exercise and cold mountain water and love, and watching the light on Wyn's face while he was reading me a little book of poems he brought along . . . He was wonderful when he got excited he walked up and down, as I lay there I saw his feet going to and fro in moccasins like he was wading in firelight . . .

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY, *Kitty Foyle*

Kind Hearths Or Coronets

Then the little maid she said,
" Your fire may warm the bed,
But what shall we do for to eat?
Will the flames you're only rich in
make a fire in the kitchen.
And the little God of Love turn the Spit?"

18th Century Nursery Rhyme

Grate Fun

. . . Sonia and Lord Montdore went upstairs to change, and when Sonia came down again she found Polly, still in her day clothes, sitting on that white rug in front of the fire.

She said, " What are you doing, Polly, it's very late. Go up and dress. Where's Boy then? "

Polly got up and stretched herself and said, " He's gone home and I've got something to tell you. Boy and I are going to be married."

At first, of course, Sonia didn't believe it, but Polly never jokes as you know . . . Sonia herself said that when she came down and found Polly sitting on the floor she thought at once " the girl looks as if she had been making love," and said she'd never seen her look like that before, flushed, her eyes simply huge and a curl of tousled hair hanging over her forehead—she was absolutely struck by her appearance, and then Polly told her—

NANCY MITFORD, *Love in a Cold Climate*

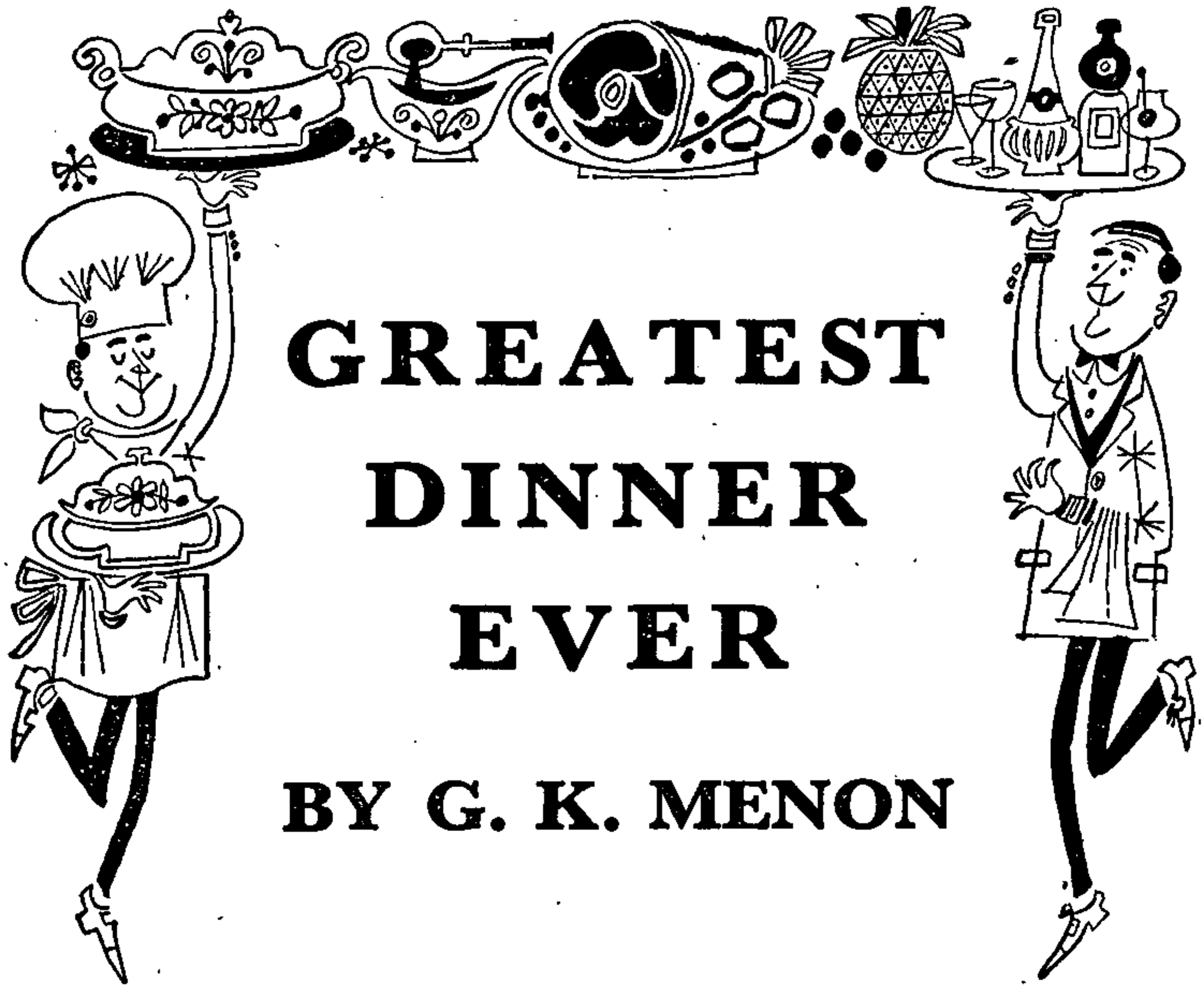
Glowing Embers

When you are old and grey and full of sleep,
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;

How many loved your moments of glad grace,
And loved your beauty with love false or true;
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows of your changing face.

And bending down beside the glowing bars
Murmur, a little sadly, how love fled
And paced upon the mountains overhead
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

W. B. YEATS, *When You Are Old*



GREATEST DINNER EVER

BY G. K. MENON

SIX SHILLINGS and fourpence halfpenny . . ."

I went down to the changing-rooms after a late banquet that night, and came upon young Jasper counting his money. He was slumped miserably over a chair, his long neck drooping over its back as he sat astride it, and in his hand he held a little pile of silver and coppers. When I entered he looked up. Poor Jasper's usually blank face was sad and drawn.

"Six shillings and fourpence halfpenny," he muttered dully.

I stood watching him for a moment in silence. It would be Christmas in a week, and even in the Hotel Magnifique we liked to see happy faces at Yuletide. In the two months he had been with us as our youngest apprentice, young Jasper had set an incomparable record for bumbling incompetence.

I thought of that morning two months earlier when I had gone on duty and found a crowd round the fish cook's table. Waiters, commis. waiters, cooks, and a couple of our porters were all watching with great interest a tall, gawky youth with a vacant face. What was he doing but chopping a mass of flour on a board with an enormous chopping knife.

Putting a freshman to chopping flour to make it finer is standard practice in all hardbitten old-fashioned French kitchens. But this lad was working away at it with such great gusto, and was so uplifted by the crowd of onlookers he had attracted, it was quite a pleasure to behold.

I stood staring at him now, wondering what new mischief he had got himself into. He kept goggling dumbly back at me, while he jingled the small change in his hand. I had come to like this lad, so I decided to pull him up sharply.

"Jasper, I have just had fruit salad and cream, and I don't want the cream turning sour in me. Come on, out with it, what is the matter?"

At this young Jasper seemed to perk up a little. "Maggie's coming to London," he announced.

"Who's Maggie?"

"Maggie's my girl."

I let that sink in. "Your girl? Oh yes, of course, your girl." Girls do go for all types.

"Is that why you are so worried?" I was even more mystified. "This Maggie of yours—is she a heavyweight or something?"

Jasper's back sprang erect and his usually dead-fish eyes flashed. "Maggie's an angel," he snapped. "She's a honey blonde and she's got blue eyes and she's the best girl in the world. Maggie," said Jasper with finality, "Maggie's all right."

I stepped back in wonder as the fever left him as suddenly as it came. The old slouch hit him and he slumped back again into the blues.

"Six and fourpence halfpenny," he repeated numbly.

I pulled up a chair and squatted close to him, so I could get to the bottom of this.

"O.K. So Maggie's all right. I'll take your word for it. But if she's all that and your girl too—is this the way you look forward to her visit? Come, Jasper, this won't do, you know—not at all. Isn't it time you had a haircut or something?" I suggested tentatively.

"Six and fourpence halfpenny," rasped young Jasper, raising his voice and rattling his small change ominously.

"You could get a haircut for two bob," I ventured.

"Haircut be damned!" exploded young Jasper.

For a moment I thought he was going to let fly at me. Then he subsided again in despair.

"Maggie's people are bringing her to town. They wouldn't let her come alone, and she wouldn't take anything else for a Christmas present. So that's what's the matter."

I thought I saw a faint glimmer of light. "So it's her people, eh? Don't you like them, then?"

Jasper pulled a wry face.

"I've got nothing against them. Her dad's the brewer Blenkinsop. You know, the Blenkinsop's Old Barrel beer chap. Big redfaced man with a full set of whiskers." He mused for a

moment. " He once told Maggie that if I had twice as much good sense, I would still be a halfwit," he added bitterly.

" Oh, one of those shrewd ones, is he? "

Jasper did not seem to get the point.

" Shrewd—well, he's made a pot, if that's what you mean. He owns a big hotel group as well. He's coming up with Maggie to see for himself how I'm doing. This is my first job, the first time I'm making money on my own. It's Christmas next week, and I won't be able to see Maggie again until the spring. I'd like to take her out for an evening. Not for anything grand—just for a drink or so. Look what I've got for spending money—six and fourpence halfpenny! "

At this young Jasper suddenly shot up from his chair. I watched in alarm as his head came within measurable distance of the ceiling. He flung his small change grandly on to the floor, and stumped away to the washroom. " I wish I was dead," he called over his shoulder, as I wearily began to pick up his money.

I was much moved by all this, for during the last few weeks I had learnt from his own lips the heartbreaking story of his life. He came from an honoured North Country family and started off at their accustomed Public School. After a couple of tries at his G.C.E., his valiant masters threw in the sponge—and asked Jasper's people to take him away. His final progress report was summed up in one word—wanting. The school authorities declined to commit themselves as to what was wanting.

As is usual in such families, a conference was held, and maiden Aunt Matilda said, " Let's send young Jasper into the catering trade." Whereupon Jasper's people pulled a couple of London strings and packed him off to the Hotel Magnifique.

That was how he came to be in London, working from ten in the morning until ten at night, with a senseless break from three to six, for the princely wage of two guineas per week. In return, the Hotel Magnifique promised to train him in catering, and send him out—far, far out, they said—into the wide world.

Young Jasper searched around until he found some cheap digs which, with his fares, left him with six and fourpence halfpenny per week for pocket money. He got his food at the hotel, adored the free beer nobody else would touch, and declined to smoke because he said his gullet was that long the smoke got lost in it.

The least I could do for him now was to go get him a bottle of beer from the Chef de Banquet's cupboard. By the time I got back with it, he had washed and showered and was dressing. He downed the beer in about three gulps, his adam's apple shooting the length of his throat each time.

He brightened visibly, and said, " What about it, Jimmy, why don't you lend me a quid? I'll pay you back half a crown a week, starting a fortnight hence, pay you a bob for interest, and will be your friend for life as well."

I thanked him very kindly, and further offered to bounce the beer bottle off his head. I told him, " Young Jasper, he who goes a-borrowing goes a-sorrowing, and don't let me catch you floating instalment credit loans on six shillings and fourpence halfpenny per week net."

At this the old droop hit him again, worse than ever. His long neck seemed to lengthen as it slumped over the back of his chair, his shoulders collapsed, and young Jasper sat staring vacantly at the floor, jingling his small change like a baby playing with a rattle. " Six and fourpence halfpenny," he kept repeating.

I saw something had to be done. " Leave the matter be," I told him. " Ask the Chef for the day and evening off and keep your girl company. We'll see what can be done."

I was then Commis—that is, deputy to the Hotel Magnifique's eminent Chef de Banquet. He was known far and wide as one of the great Chef Sauciers of our time, but he was tough to work with. The reason was that while all the other chefs in the Hotel Magnifique were sober by day and lit by night, the Chef de Banquet was lit by day and high as a kite by night. But he had served his apprenticeship under the great Escoffier himself, and had a vast fund of tales about the origin of many a dish on the menu. It was generally considered a unique though trying privilege to be the Commis de Banquet at the Hotel Magnifique.

If you are a bon vivant, and know your way around the most select eating-places on earth, you probably swear by the Hotel Magnifique. Hungry pilgrims from every corner of the globe converge on London, and approach its massive oak revolving doors with reverence. If there is one thing better than its impeccable food, it is its incomparable wines. Royalty, the Peerage, the International set—a steady stream of the élite repair nightly to its demure candle-lit restaurant and salon, to indulge in that rather special type of revelry that the glossies so faithfully record. With the faint air of aristocratic boredom that only a century of lavish patronage could bestow, the Magnifique receives and serves them all with the same scrupulous courtesy.

The Commis de Banquet at the Hotel Magnifique is always popular. This is because he keeps the keys to the Chef de Banquet's cupboard, and this cupboard is always filled with beer by the banqueting barmen. The thirsty and the broke rely on the Commis de Banquet to keep them wet on Wednesdays and Thursdays.

I passed the word to the chefs in the kitchen about this terrible calamity threatening young Jasper. They promised to play their part, and to pitch in as well with a silver collection. The next to tackle was the Chef de Banquet. I waited until he was mellow and soaked with Bernkasteler Doktor, and then put it to him. He was gruff and short, but the upshot of it all was that he had a word with the Maître d'Hotel, who checked with the Restaurant Manager, who consulted the General Manager's office, and soon we had it all taped.

On Saturday afternoon we packed off young Jasper to meet his girl and her people at the station and to escort them to their hotel. He then backtracked post haste to the kitchen.

A committee under the expert guidance of the Head Waiter supervised his transformation into a gay young man-about-town. His suit of tails, lent by a casual waiter just his size, fitted him to perfection. Shoes, tie, pleated shirt front—every meticulous detail was expertly adjusted. After short but complete instructions and many fearsome admonitions to watch out or else, young Jasper sped off by taxi to fetch his guests.

The show started at eight. The taxi disgorged a tranquil-looking lady in her early forties, clad in stately blue, and a blonde wide-eyed girl in a frothy champagne-pink tulle dress. Next came young Jasper. A massive man with a walrus moustache brought up the rear of the convoy, like a battleship escort. Our Chief Commissionaire, aided by a deputy and a couple of bell-boys, received them in person. He bowed them into the foyer where the Restaurant Manager waited.

Mr. Constanza of the Magnifique had just that air of jaunty authority that enabled him to handle gumchewing American tourists and impoverished European ex-royalty with the same affable ease. He escorted Madame and Mademoiselle into the plush Louis XV cocktail bar. Jasper followed, airily pointing out objects of interest to Mr. Blenkinsop. Mr. Constanza took their order in person, and passed it to the head barman. While two assistants went to work on it, the head barman hovered behind, and later served the party himself. A few minutes later Mr. Constanza returned with Mr. Hayward, the Deputy General Manager on duty. Had Monsieur, Madame, and Mademoiselle had a comfortable journey from the North? Their table was all ready for them in the salon. He hoped and trusted they would find the service satisfactory.

Half an hour and two cocktails later, young Jasper ushered his guests into the salon. Louis, the famous Maître d'Hotel of the Magnifique, received them at the door. Past rows of obsequious

underlings, specially marshalled for the occasion, they were conducted to a magnificently laid table at the finest point of vantage in the crowded salon. Amid an audible hush, the party was seated.

The menu for the day had been decided by the Chef de Banquet—for the chefs in the kitchen could not agree on it among themselves. The Chef Poissonnaire demanded the right of the main entrée, since young Jasper was a commis under him. He was overruled and a classic five-course menu was created. Each section of the kitchen chose its contribution with care, and the whole had been integrated by the Chef de Banquet.

The first course was jambon de Parme au melon. On a bed of crushed ice, four quarters of succulent melon were dressed to show off their sun-ripe, honeydew kernels, with sauce boats of ginger and sugar. The delicious Parma ham was sliced paper-thin, and arranged on a bed of lettuce. It was a famous combination to launch a memorable dinner.

Excited commis waiters kept the kitchen informed on every step in the proceedings. It appeared that young Jasper in tails was not quite so awkward a sight as we had imagined. The grapevine reported him as filling out his role. He gave the wine waiter a haughty look when he approached with the champagne. He made a derogatory remark about waiters in general, turning a baleful eye on one who was vainly trying to choke down a giggle.

Next came the soup—tortue claire au sherry, served with crackling cheese straws, sent up specially by the Pastry Chef.

The Chef Potager had distilled a clear gold brew, laced it liberally with sherry, and plentifully garnished it with diced turtle meat. The Chef de Banquet, whose palate disdained anything weaker than neat Scotch, pronounced it excellent.

By now, even Mr. Blenkinsop was beginning to be impressed. He knew the Magnifique only too well, and had never entered its cloistered interior without doffing his hat and lowering his voice to a muted whisper. He knew, too, that the red carpet treatment was never extended by the Magnifique to anyone less than a reigning sovereign. He looked at young Jasper with a rather baffled air, and then turned round to regard the obvious respect that filled the salon. The word had gone round—unidentified V.I.P.s. For the Hotel Magnifique to unbend like this—they must be V.V.I.P.s, they said. Meanwhile, young Jasper was reported to have launched into a diatribe against the Catering Wages Act, with Maggie and her mother as his engrossed audience, and Mr. Blenkinsop squirming as the only catering employer present.

For the fish course, the Chef Poissonnaire had chosen young Jasper's favourite dish—homard thermidor. Cooked lobster

meat was tossed in butter, swilled with white wine and cream laced with mustard. It was then stuffed into a lobster shell, coated with rich Mornay sauce, finished au gratin. On burnished silver, a white paper doily, the red lobster shell, the melody in black, brown, and white of the glazed sauce—the head waiter gave the thumbs-up sign as he took the dish in.

The champagne was of a famous vintage year. Young Jasper stared at the serving wine waiter, unable to believe it—and when the cork popped out, so nearly did his eyes. He gingerly tasted the first sparkling glassful—and soon it was his eyes that had a glassy sparkle. His guests followed suit. Madame said the mustard made her thirsty, and Mademoiselle said champagne looked like golden soda-pop, only more so. Mr. Blenkinsop, who was as good a trencherman as any, said nothing—but there was a faraway look in his eyes as he downed his second glass.

The Chef de Banquet, resplendent in immaculate white, presented himself. He hoped the food was up to the expectations of Madame, Mademoiselle, and Monsieur. Madame was gracious in her thanks. Mademoiselle blushed very prettily and looked adoringly at Jasper. Mr. Blenkinsop cleared his throat and allowed that the food was good—in fact, very good, Chef, very good indeed. The salon was electrified. The Chef himself had attended. Young Jasper was heard to remark quite audibly that the homard thermidor was good, but might have been better.

The main entrée was suprême de volaille Maryland. The breadcrumbed breast of chicken was gently sautéed off and dished up with rashers of bacon, banana fritters, and sweetcorn pancakes. The sauce was Raifort—a white chicken cream flavoured with brandy and horseradish. With haricots verts au beurre and pommes soufflées, the entrée was complete.

By now the party was getting into its stride. Madame was surveying the other women diners with a critical eye while she sipped the bubbly. Her shoulders were arching back, there was a zip in her remarks, and a lilt to her laughter. Maggie looked around in open-eyed entrancement, for the Blenkinsops were strict and she was not yet considered old enough to dine out.

Mr. Blenkinsop was visibly growing more expansive every moment, as he launched into an interminable story about a French waitress who said oui, oui, and brought him buttered snails when he ordered scones. Jasper, wolfing chicken with relish, commented learnedly on snails he had known and buttered.

The champagne was renewed. Madame was positively frisky when Mr. Blenkinsop led her down to dance. Maggie, fair hair gleaming against cheeks flushed with both champagne and shyness, nestled coyly against young Jasper and drew every eye on

the dance floor. Henry Cuillet, band leader and impresario of the Magnifique had been tipped off in advance, and Madame's choice was the order of the day. Soon she was waltzing gaily away, while young Jasper followed suit with Maggie.

It was quite an evening.

They topped it off with pineapple flavoured with flaming kirsch. Petit fours and coffee followed. Champagne flowed steadily until the very end.

Old Blenkinsop was nobody's fool, and by now his eyes had that queer cod-fish look in them that great financiers assume when weighing up tricky propositions. He knew young Jasper's people, and being a generous man he did not hold young Jasper against them. For quite a while he had the air of a man refusing to believe his eyes. But the champagne, the royal service, the courtly salon . . .

An apprentice who could persuade the Magnifique to roll out the red carpet for his personal guests was to Mr. Blenkinsop a very smart operator indeed. And if there was one thing Mr. Blenkinsop was always interested in, it was a smart operator. Which was why he led young Jasper off to a final whisky and cigar in masculine privacy in the bar, while the women retired, Madame collected and quiet, Maggie betwixt tears and titters, to the powder-room. Young Jasper must have had within him a real bulldog streak, for when they emerged from the bar he had a fat smile on his face. Mr. Blenkinsop had invited him to join his Hotel Group as a trainee manager early in the spring, and Jasper had said yes, if you'll pay double. Mr. Blenkinsop winced—but Madame's peremptory whisper to sign on young Jasper still rang clear in his ears, and he agreed.

It was close on midnight when the party broke up. The head waiter had thoughtfully lent young Jasper a pound note to place upon the table when he signed the bill. Louis personally escorted the party to the door, where Mr. Constanza and Mr. Hayward waited. Other guests stood aside, like courtiers at a durbar, as the procession gently wound its way through the vestibule and foyer. The Chief Commissionaire had a taxi waiting. At the hotel entrance, young Jasper pleaded urgent business, taking in the entire Magnifique with a lordly sweep of his arm.

While Madame was being handed into the taxi, Jasper said good-bye to Maggie. There were stars in her eyes as she kissed him good night. Poor bumbling Jasper—out from school, out from home, out from the stream of clever, up-and-coming young men—poor Jasper had made good after all. He had come all alone to this great big cauldron of a city called London, and had placed its greatest hotel at her service. He had found his feet—they were

on the road to success. That night in London, no more bashful, blissful girl blew a kiss than Maggie Blenkinsop.

A final adieu, a tearful wave, and the taxi swung on to the Thames embankment. With wine in his head and love in his heart, young Jasper watched it snake away along the river front. He stepped out of the ring of light outside the Magnifique, into the shadow of the Embankment Gardens. There he stood and dreamt a dream of Maggie, and a career that rolled away before him—and this his most memorable Christmas ever. The evening's party had been a gift from the Magi—or was Maggie the gift—or was Maggie the Magi . . . ?

Minutes later, young Jasper snapped out of it and streaked back to the hotel. He had just remembered that urgent business—to return the suit of tails that had been lent strictly for the evening and to say thank you. He sneaked through the staff entrance and made for the kitchen. We were all still waiting impatiently to find out how he had fared. We dismissed as ridiculous reports from the restaurant about his highhanded manner with the serving staff. We wanted confirmation that he had survived the evening.

The Chef de Service—who had a rare taste in practical jokes—was lying in wait, and nabbed young Jasper before he could enter the kitchen. He took him into the Chef's office, and on top of his champagne, fed him two shots of neat whisky. Tight as a drum, he guided him to the kitchen door and let him loose.

A cheer shook the building as we beheld young Jasper, in breathtaking tails. He held aloft his banner of triumph—the special menu the Magnifique had printed for its greatest dinner ever. He came staggering into the kitchen, and ploughed through the crowding commis all agog with questions.

Like a homing pigeon he made for the Poissonnaire's corner, where his buddies closed in.

"How was it, Jasper; how did it go?" they asked him.

Young Jasper stood goggling dumbly back at them for a moment.

"My Maggie," said he. "Oh, my Maggie . . ."

His hands outstretched, he spreadeagled forward. They caught him as he fell, and eased him gently on to the table.

There, amid the salmon and the soles, he passed out completely.

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★ ★ ★

RECORD PERFORMANCE

Disc jockey: One who earns his living by putting on airs.

Venetian Shadow

BY BRIAN CLEEVE

SHE lay face downwards on the red towel. Her hair dark gold from the water, sweeping sideways to fall into the shadowed hollow by her shoulder. Her skin paler gold, gold-dusted by the sun. I felt my hands move, as if they had a life, a will of their own—to touch her shoulder, brush downwards to the narrow waist, the swift, sudden upward curve from the loins, the thigh. To bend down, bury my face in the moist, lion-gold of her hair, taste the salt from her skin. I closed my hands into fists, drove them softly against the hot sand. What had Minelli said?

"You think there isn't any way for one man to watch one woman day and night? You really think that?" And the eyes dark as sloes in his sallow, narrow face had looked at me as if I had admitted not knowing how to read and write. And I suppose that in Minelli's alphabet I couldn't. Lieutenant Minelli, Vicente, of the Italian Finance Police. Very suave. Very knowing.

We had stood inside the little café opposite her hotel, waiting for her to come out.

"Lend me a man," I had begged, and Minelli had spread his hands.

"I have three jobs for every man I've got," he said. "We've already done everything you asked."

"But I'm by myself," I said. "I can't watch her day and night. . ." That was when Minelli smiled. And a moment later she had stepped out of the hotel, stood poised for a second in the harsh glare of the sunlight in the little square.

I had caught my breath, leaned forward until my forehead touched the window-glass. And felt quite sick inside my stomach to think that this girl was what Minelli had told me she was. I had never seen a girl so beautiful. Very tall. Very slim. In a linen dress so white that it looked startling against the gold tan of her arms and her slender throat. Her hair like a weight of gold;

" I'm by myself," I said,
" I can't watch her day and night"

like a mane. Alive, heavy. She put on sunglasses, turned away.

Minelli touched my arm. " You still think you can't watch her day and night? " I felt myself flushing scarlet.

" You are very young," Minelli said gently. " You think it impossible that beautiful people should be bad. But I have told you what we have seen."

" I know," I said. The Narcotics Bureau had tipped off the Italians that a consignment of heroin was going from Marseilles through Italy, on its way to the U.S., and begged them not to stop it, but to trace it for us from hand to hand. Because what we really wanted was to find the man who was waiting for it in the States.

And one of the hands that it had gone through had been this girl's. Ulla Jorgensen. Danish passport. Twenty-one. Officially a student.

She had collected it from a Swede, Lars Borg.

" He's a confidence man by trade," Minelli had said, " with a little blackmail if it comes his way." But new people were trying to move in on the drug traffic, and they must have chosen

him as an unknown face to act as courier. Only he hadn't been unknown, at least to Minelli.

He had been seen with Ulla Jorgensen before, earlier in the summer, when he was simply being watched as a suspected con-man. Now he had been seen with her again, for two days, while Minelli had watched to see to whom he would deliver his heroin. And apparently he hadn't delivered it to anyone. He had suddenly run out of Venice without even taking his suitcase from his hotel.

Minelli, piecing fragments of three reports together, had realised that Ulla Jorgensen had made the actual delivery. A man had seen her leave Lars Borg's hotel with a parcel of books, and thought nothing of it. Another man had seen her going on to a motor ferry with the same parcel, the next morning. Later that day she was seen coming from the docks, without it. And the same night Lars Borg disappeared.

It was only then that it became obvious what had happened. The books had been hollowed out inside, and filled with heroin; and Ulla Jorgensen had taken them on to a boat in the docks and handed them over. The question was, which boat? And who had received the books? Which was what I had come to find out.

" She's all yours," Minelli said. " I'm sorry, but we've done all we can." He spread his hands, smiled apologetically. " I wish you luck. When we can help you again, let me know."

In five days since then there had been nothing. Except for me to scrape acquaintance with Ulla Jorgensen, become her escort. To Florian's; to picture galleries; to the Lido. To lie with her on the sand among the bright umbrellas, the sunbathers scattered like coloured starfish along the flat yellow ribbon of the beach, and want inside me to touch her skin until it was like a pain, like a stone in my throat.

Five days. I had stumbled against her on purpose in the vaporetto, going out to the Lido, the same day Minelli had shown her to me. Apologised in Swedish, and she had turned round and smiled, and again I had caught my breath because it wasn't possible that she could be so beautiful and yet be what Minelli said.

Her eyes were the grey-blue of woodsmoke, full of depth and movement. And she smiled slowly, as if she smiled only after she had thought about it, weighed it in her mind. It gave her smile the air of a great compliment, and for a second I felt absurdly pleased; flattered.

Until I remembered why I had stumbled against her. What I was doing.

"You are American?" she said.

"Swedish-American. Is my accent as bad as that?"

She laughed. "So many Scandinavian Americans come to Denmark. It's easy to recognise. . ."

That had been the beginning. Five days. Looking back they seemed sometimes like as many weeks. Or minutes. And not once in all those days had there been a hint that she was not what she seemed: a girl on holiday. A girl that one could . . . I drove my fists into the sand again, lay down and hid my face between my hands.

After a moment I felt her fingers on my arm.

"What is the matter?" she said. "You are strange today."

I looked sideways; her face was only a few inches away from mine, her eyes looking into mine.

If I leaned across the sand, only a very little, I could kiss her mouth. And I knew that for four of the five days she had been waiting for me to do exactly that, and wondering why I didn't. Her mouth would be like velvet, warmed in the sun. I felt my head move. Closed my eyes. And still I moved. As if the sand was moving me.

I felt the salt coolness of her breath against my mouth; touched her lips with my lips. Brushed them together. And my heart hammered against the bones of my ribs as if it would break out.

Her hand went behind my neck, pressed, drew me against her. For a long second we kissed and there was nothing in the world but our two bodies on the sand, our mouths kissing.

Until quite suddenly we were apart again. She rolled on her back, stared at the bright sky with half-closed eyes. And I lay face downwards, trying to tell myself who I was, who she was, what I had to do. To find out one thing from her, and then leave her like a piece of refuse for Minelli to sweep into gaol when the moment came.

"Tell me," she whispered. "Why did you never kiss me before?"

Inside me my heart stilled. Almost grew cold. While my mind grew very clear, like a torch switched on in the dark. And I hated myself even as I became a policeman again, knew that this was a moment I had waited for.

"Because you already have a boyfriend," I said. "I didn't mean to kiss you now."

She turned her head on the sand, looked at me. "How did you know about him?" she murmured.

"Tourist gossip," I said lightly. "The seducers' network. When is he coming back?"

She seemed to think about it a long time.

"I don't know," she said at last. "For me, maybe never."

"Did you quarrel?" I said softly.

"No," she said. "Only . . . maybe it's my fault, maybe I want too much. When we met . . . almost my first day in Venice . . . he seemed like . . . like a piece of music that you hear and think you'll never hear too often." She turned her head, stared at the sky. "And you hear it twice, and three times . . . and suddenly it's a very ordinary tune. And you know that soon you won't want to hear it any more. Do you think that every meeting is like that?" She shaded her eyes against the setting sun, and in the shadow of her hand her mouth looked tragic, very young and lonely.

And I felt a longing in me to take her by the shoulders, shake her, tell her that I didn't care, beg her to tell me that it was Borg's fault that she had done what she had done. Hold her against me, promise her wild things.

A breath of wind came off the lagoon, almost cold after the long heat of the afternoon. She shivered, stood up.

"Let's go back," she said. The moment when she might have talked was gone again. Had I let it go? I tried not to feel glad that it was gone, not to let myself know what I felt.

We hardly spoke in the vaporetto. Sat side by side towards the front, watching the lagoon change from blue to violet in the sunset; burn with fires. Behind us a group of Austrian students began to sing; one with a pure, high voice singing the verses while the others took the refrain. Venice floated towards us on the enamelled water as if that instant Canaletto had created it; as if it was a mirage. Ulla's hand touched mine and I looked sideways at her face. I think I would have given everything I had, if I had had anything to give, for us to be two students like those behind us. To step ashore. To have no secrets. To hold hands. To be in love.

I would tell her about my home. About the river where I learnt to fish. About a thousand things. And she would tell me . . . what? What had she told me about herself? Very little. And how much of that little need be true? That her father was a country doctor on one of the Danish islands in the Baltic. That he had married so late in life that he was like her grandfather. That her mother had died when she was born. And she had told me how lonely the house had been, cold and empty, with the old heart-broken man hating to hear a child sing or laugh.

"Until the loneliness became part of me," she said, "and it seemed wrong to be happy, to be young . . ."

All that could have been true. Could account for the strange

quietness that she had, as if she was used to long periods of silence, of being neither seen nor heard. And for a still stranger air she had of being two people. As if inside the still, quiet self there was another self, wild and burning. The self that had kissed me for that moment on the sand. The self that carried heroin for Lars Borg, maybe. But I didn't want to think of that. What else did I know of her, or think I knew of her? Nothing more. Nothing more at all.

"Be careful," I whispered to myself. "Be very careful."

The boat touched the pier of our landing place, and the Austrian singers poured off the motor ferry in their leather shorts and white, embroidered shirts. We followed them, walked up the narrow, slightly climbing street that led away from the quay, through a small square, over a canal bridge.

We had walked a long way before I realised we were being followed. One of Minelli's men? But why? The feeling of it grew stronger, like the lightest of feather touches on my shoulder-blades. Infinitesimally light. Yet completely certain. Twice I stopped by a window, glanced back. But there were too many men it could have been. We turned off the shopping street into a narrow lane. So narrow that we couldn't walk side by side. Halfway up it angled sharply. We reached the corner, turned it.

"Please go on," I said. "I must tie up my shoelace." She strolled on slowly, lost in her own thoughts. I bent down, waited. Heard light footsteps. Tensed myself. And a man came round the corner with a smooth, practised rush; lashed out with a kick that took me in the face and smashed the twilight shadows of the lane into burning cinders, catherine wheels of fire.

I went back against the wall, felt my head strike stone. Heard the sound of it dispassionately, as if it belonged to someone else, and slipped down very slowly on to the cold cobbles. Another kick exploded in my stomach, and again, and I tried to roll, cover my stomach and my face. Somewhere a woman screamed.

"Tell Lars what's waiting for him," a voice whispered. Knuckles with a sharp ring gashed across my cheek. Feet ran.

I lay on my face and vomited on to the stones while above me a voice called my name, "Jan, Jan." Hands touched me and I struggled to my knees, prepared to fight. And saw through the darkness that it was Ulla, kneeling beside me, trying to lift me from the ground, wipe the blood from my face. And for a moment it seemed the one good thing in the world that she was there. For one moment. Then my brain began to work again, to think. Had she arranged for this to happen? I felt sick again. Above our heads a shutter opened, a woman called down. From up the lane someone came running.

"Get me away," I whispered to Ulla. Whatever she was we were two professionals. I didn't want outsiders asking stupid questions. "The hotel," I said again. "I'll be all right."

I stumbled through waves of pain, leaning on Ulla's shoulder. I love her, I thought. She tried to have me killed, maybe, and I love her. It was as if I was drunk.

We went through the narrow hallway of the hotel, up the stairs. Into the wonderful, cool darkness of the room. I fell on the bed, listened to Ulla running water in the basin, soaking a towel. It stung my face like ice and fire, made me cry out and grip her wrist. She bent over me, her breast gold above the green linen of her dress, her hair falling, brushing my cheek.

"Let me fetch a doctor," she said.

I rolled my head from side to side on the pillow. "No. No." Her hair brushed across my mouth.

"Then the police," she said.

And I caught my breath. There was nothing in her face or in her eyes that shouldn't have been there. Not a shadow of hesitation, of guilty knowledge.

I shook my head again. "I just want to be left," I said. "No talking. It was just a sneak thief, trying to get my wallet." Maybe she'd even believe that that was what I thought. "If you called the police it would only mean a lot of trouble."

She touched my face for a moment with a cool hand. Friendship? Or an enemy's salute? There was disinfectant and a small box of adhesive plaster on the shelf over the basin and she fetched it, dressed the worst of my face.

"I'll be all right," I said again. Suddenly I was so tired that I had to fight not to fall backwards into unconsciousness. She hesitated by the bed, putting a glass of water beside me on the table. "I'll be all right," I whispered. "See you tomorrow . . . eleven . . . your hotel . . ." Sleep coming up like a blackjack, beating my skull.

"No, I'll come here," she said, and I nodded, fell back, felt her hand—was it her hand?—brush against my face. All dark. Heard the door close . . . slept like falling into a deep well.

It was past eleven when I woke next day. Slits of sunlight knifing between the blinds. The sound of a maid singing as she cleaned the room next door. I lay for a long time feeling how bad the bruises were. Finally I got up from the bed like an old man, washed my face. I looked like somebody else, my lips thickened and a bruise on one cheek like a rotten plum. It took me half an hour to shave, and the result wasn't wonderful even then. Outside in the sunlight clocks began to strike. Ten

. . . eleven . . . twelve. I stood and listened. Remembered. She had been coming here at eleven. I rang down to the desk.

"No, signore. No one has been here." I dressed very slowly. Smoked a cigarette. Rang her hotel. She had gone out. About ten, perhaps. No, she had left no message for anyone.

I rang Minelli. He listened, clicked his tongue.

"I'll have her found for you," he said. A little as if I was a child who had lost a toy. "Will you be able to carry on?"

"Yes," I said. "Thanks." I lay back on the bed, tried to think. The maid came in and I sent her for coffee. It was as if something heavy had rolled off my mind; as if I had come to the surface from deep under the sea. As near as nothing I had been taken for a long, long ride.

She had fixed the beating for me because I was getting in the way. Simple as I was I must have been getting under her feet. Therefore she had had me mildly removed so she could get on with her work. It was quite clear. Except for one thing. "Tell Lars what's waiting for him!"

What had he meant by that, the man who had beaten me up? Or had I got the words wrong? What else could it have been? I went round and round it like a fly round an open sore, until finally I threw it away.

"What you're really trying is to find an out for her," I said to the mirror, and the mirror nodded. "Do you want to get killed before you learn?" The mirror shook its head. And I went back and lay on the bed, feeling very cold inside. Very lonely, as if I had lost a friend.

It was almost four o'clock before Minelli rang. "She's in a café by the Colleoni monument," he said. "Can you get there fast? I want my man for something else."

"Thanks," I said. "I'll be fast." It wasn't very far away. Ten minutes to walk. A small square, full of sunlight. Tables outside a café. Ulla sitting alone, her back to me.

I came up quickly, touched her shoulder, and she spun round as if my hand had burnt her, her face grey under the tan.

"Jan!" she whispered. Her mouth worked, she tried to smile, tried to seem pleased that I was suddenly there. "How did you find me?"

"The police found you," I said. And as I said the word *police* even her shadow of pretence crumbled. She sat very still, as if I had shot her through the heart, her eyes like burnt-out charcoal, her mouth a little open, but no sound coming out of it. It was horrible to see. And as if she knew how horrible it must be she made a sudden clawing movement with her hands, covered her face with them. After a long moment she looked at

me again, said in a very small, lost voice, "And you? Are you from the police?"

I nodded, not bothering to explain. She closed her eyes, swayed, as if she was going to faint.

"There's one chance," I said. "One chance for you. Tell me who you gave the parcel to, and the name of the ship."

"The *King Midas*," she said mechanically. "I gave it to the Chief Steward, Lars' friend. But I didn't know . . ."

I sat back, let out my breath. There wasn't anything more I needed to do. Minelli could handle the rest in his own time. I should have felt very good. I tried not to look at the way she was. Tried not to remember that I had kissed her mouth, touched her hair. "I promised you one chance," I said. "This is it. Go away. Go home. The police here aren't very interested in you yet. Maybe you can still get clean again." I leaned forward across the table, and she shrank as if I had struck her in the face.

"Have you ever seen what happens to your customers?" I said. "The ones who use the stuff?"

"Don't, Jan," she whispered. "I didn't know. . ." She looked at me with haggard eyes. "I just took the parcel for him. . . just some books. He said it was urgent, and that he hadn't time; and I had nothing special to do that morning . . . they were just books, Jan, books. And then this morning he rang, said he was back, and to meet him. I didn't even want to go. Not . . . not after . . ."

She looked away from me, and I sat looking down at my hands, wondering why I was listening. Let her tell Minelli this, if she was fool enough to stay.

"But I owed it to him, Jan . . . because . . . because once I thought . . ." She stopped, looked at me beseechingly. "Please," she whispered, "please, Jan, try and believe."

"What do you want me to believe?" I said harshly. "That this morning Lars told you, to your shocked astonishment, that you had actually been carrying illegal drugs?"

She gathered herself as if I had struck her too hard, too often. The colour came back to her face, burnt. "Yes," she said. "That is what he told me. And that he needed money. He gave me six hours to find him all I could, or else he would have to give my name to the police. He would get a large reward, he said, if he turned State's Witness. But he would be sorry to see me go to gaol."

"How unkind," I said. "And what have you been doing since?" When she had told me, I would go. It would be a pathetic story. The attempt to pawn her few treasured jewels.

To borrow from someone, anyone. Except from me, of course. Her innocent terrors. I could carry the memory of it away with me, so that if I was ever tempted again to believe that a beautiful woman couldn't—

"I have been sitting here," she said.

I had half risen from the chair. I stopped. Looked at her. The answer was so far from what I had expected.

"Just . . . sitting here?"

And suddenly I wasn't sure of anything.

"I didn't know what to do," she said. "And time went by, and I kept thinking that in a little while it would seem different, that perhaps then I could even come and tell you . . . ask you to help . . ." She looked away. "I am glad I didn't come," she said. "I expect it would have amused you very much."

"No," I said. "No. Nothing about this amuses me. Where is Lars Borg now?" It was crazy. I hadn't any right to do what I was going to do. And yet I had to know.

"He'll be in his room," she said. "Waiting for me to bring him money. Or maybe already he's telephoned the police? Is that how you came?"

"No," I said. "Take me to his room." We went out of the square, across the little bridge over the canal. Turned down a lane. Half a dozen lanes and turnings.

"This is it," Ulla said. "What are you going to do?" A tall, narrow building, crammed between other buildings that seemed to lean towards us, already in shadow from the afternoon sun. "He lives at the top."

"He's going to tell me if your story is true," I said. I rang the bell, and after a little time a slattern opened the door, let us by.

We went up in silence, Ulla first. Once I had to touch her to make her go on. Until we were on a narrow landing outside a closed door. Ulla looked at nothing, withdrawn, as if this was barely a concern of hers. As if she had gone back into a last refuge of pride.

"Call out to him," I whispered.

"Lars," she whispered in a thin, cracked voice. And then, much louder. "It's Ulla . . ."

There was no answer. No sound. The weak, dusty bulb on the landing went out, controlled by a time switch, or by the slattern below. I heard Ulla catch her breath in the sudden dark. There was no line of light round the door in front of us. I touched it with my hand, found the handle. The door whispered open, and we were still in darkness. And yet I knew that there was someone there. I went softly in. Drew Ulla with me

Listened. Only the sound of Ulla's breathing. I reached out, brushed a switch with my hand, filled the room with light.

He was sitting behind a table, quite easily, in a wooden chair with armrests, leaning back. A young man with blond rather too-long hair, bleached even fairer by the sun. A curl fell artistically across a wide brown forehead. His head lay back against the top of the wooden chair, his mouth a little open, his face surprised.

" Lars," whispered Ulla. And still he didn't move.

I went forward, touched his shoulder. His head rolled sideways. I went behind him, and there, between two rungs of the ladderback chair, was a small wet stain, a dark slit in the pale grey cloth of his jacket. Small, but evidently big enough. A knife must have been driven into his back on the left, below the shoulderblade. A very thin knife. The kind that a woman could have driven in quite easily. I looked at Ulla across the quiet room. Her face was white again, as it had been in the café.

" Is he dead? " she whispered. She slid her tongue over her lips as she asked the question, looked at the dead man's face as if it hypnotised her.

" You know he is," I said, and suddenly I felt old and tired. Older even than Minelli, who had seen this kind of thing too often to be made old by it any more.

" No," she breathed. " No, I didn't know. . ." Looked at me. " Please," she said. Her lips not like velvet now. Not warm. Almost blue in the nakedness of the light. The kind of light that Minelli would shine on her while he asked the questions. The questions. The questions. About how she had killed Lars Borg. When? Why? Only her hair seemed still alive. Falling to her shoulder, each thick lock tumbling down as if it wanted to be first to reach her skin. Like downward flames, eager to be burning. Was the Medusa's hair like that?

I felt so sick I couldn't move, couldn't speak. And Ulla looked at me as if she was drowning, and only I could save her, reach out a hand to save her.

" Please," she said again. I shook my head.

" Maybe there's an answer," I said. " But don't give it to me. Save it for Lieutenant Minelli at the Questura. He'll want it."

" No," she said. Put her knuckles against her mouth, closed her eyes. I moved out from behind the chair and she turned to run, flinging herself against the door. And as she flung herself it opened, hard and sudden, and the edge caught her across the face, sent her staggering back.

A man stood in the doorway, and for a second I thought it was one of Minelli's men. Until I saw the knife in his hand. A thin,

narrow blade. The kind that folds into its own handle. The kind that must have killed Lars Borg.

"I'm glad you came," he said pleasantly.

He was short, and very broad. His nose had been broken at some time, and seemed to cling in against his thick, meat-padded face. "Your two boyfriends have had their warnings," he said to Ulla. "I'm afraid Borg's was final." He stood very easily, waiting for one of us to try to move.

"We don't like new people around here," he said. And as he said it, things fell into place. The sentence the man had whispered to me after he had kicked me half unconscious the night before. "Tell Lars what's waiting for him." Seeing me with Ulla, he had thought I was a colleague of Borg's, helping him to push in on the territory. While Borg had disappeared six days ago because he had already been threatened. He had lost his nerve and run for it. Given his parcel of heroin to Ulla, asked her to deliver some books as a casual favour to a holiday friend. And then, desperate for money, had come back to blackmail her. And I hadn't believed her. She had begged me to believe her and I had been too knowing. Too old and tired.

I felt her sway, put my hands under her elbows to steady her. Where the edge of the door had caught her cheek there was a slow ooze of blood. And I wanted desperately that she should turn and look at me, see that now I believed. But it was long too late. I knew that.

"Now yours is coming," the man said to Ulla. "I'm going to carve you a little so as you'll remember me." He held up the knife for the light to catch its blade, while Ulla stood like a statue, her mouth open, twisted, as if she wanted to scream and couldn't.

He held the thin blade this way and that, admiring it, like an artist admiring a fine new brush. "You move back against the wall, friend," he said to me. "And if you're squeamish, don't look. Don't move, either. I'm fast with this."

I took a slow step backwards, and he nodded approval, moved his hand in a smooth swing towards Ulla's face. And from my back foot I jumped, took him with my shoulder in the ribs, flung my arms round him as he twisted, swung his arm back again, and drove the knife at my chest. I felt it skid and tear and burn on bone, sink into deep flesh. And we went back, carried by my rush through the open door, on to the narrow landing, against the thin, age-rotted banisters. Wood splintering, weight going, falling, falling. He hit the stairs under me, and we rolled, and hit floor and then wall, and lay. He lay very still.

I tried to breathe, and bright blood came out of my mouth and

stained his white shirt. Then there was nothing except pain, coming like red waves out of the dark.

I woke in hospital. Slept and woke for two days. And woke finally with my stomach stitched up, and one broken leg in plaster, hanging from a pulley. Grapes by the bed, and an ugly nurse, and messages from Minelli. Later he came in and we attended to our common business. Sent off code-cables to my office about the *King Midas* and its Chief Steward. Arranged about my evidence in the trial of the man who had killed Lars Borg, and very nearly killed me. I was glad to hear that he had broken more bones than I had in the fall.

"And Ulla?" I said.

Minelli looked at his fingernails. "I sent her home," he said. He looked at me, smiled very slightly. "I am not so bad about women as you think. Whatever she knew, she didn't know very much, and nothing about Borg's death. Maybe she was even telling the whole truth and knew nothing about anything at all."

"She knew nothing," I said. "Only I was too clever to see."

Minelli shrugged. "It can always be." He rapped his knuckles softly against my plaster cast. "If I lose my job over it, you will have to find something for me with your people."

I looked away from him towards the bright square of the window. "Did she—leave any message?"

He shook his head. Then maybe he saw my face, and added for kindness, "Perhaps we didn't give her time to think of it. I got her out pretty fast, for her own sake."

"You were good to do that," I said. "Very good."

He grinned, gave me an ironic salute, went away. After that he used to come for a few minutes every day, and once more, after a week of trying not to, I asked if he had heard from her.

"Why should we hear from her?" he said. "You know, I think you wasted your opportunities with that girl, Jan. You should have got her out of your system when you had the chance."

That was the last time we talked about her. Two weeks went slowly by. Three. I could limp now, with a pair of sticks. Until suddenly it was the last day. In half an hour I would be leaving Venice. Tomorrow I would be out of Europe. I leaned my forehead against the window-glass, stared at the street, a bridge over a canal. Behind me the door opened.

"I came to say good-bye," Minelli said. I turned round. And saw that he was grinning, holding up a letter.

"For me?" I whispered. My mouth dry, my throat tight. It wasn't possible that it was from her. It couldn't be. And yet . . . I reached out my hand, ripped the envelope with shaking fingers,

fumbled the page open. Turned away to the window so that Minelli wouldn't see my face.

Dear Jan, the thin page whispered to me, *I never thanked you, although I have remembered you every day. I thought you would not let me thank you; that you would still believe I was . . . Only when the Italian Lieutenant wrote to me . . .*

I whirled on him. "What did you write to her?" But he was almost out of the door, his smile infinitely experienced, infinitely pitying.

"Only how foolish you still were," he said. The door almost closed, opened again. "By the way, I re-routed your passage home via Copenhagen. You can break your journey there for a few days to rest your leg . . ." The door closed finally.

I went back to the window, saw him step into the street, swift and dapper. A girl passed, and he saluted her, said something that made her turn towards him. Even at that distance I could see her laugh against her will.

I bent my head. *Dear Jan*, the letter whispered. As if her voice was in the room. *I have remembered you. . .* And a last line that I hadn't read. *He said that your plane would be landing on Thursday, at four o'clock.* Thursday. Tomorrow. I looked at my watch, began to count the hours.

Down in the street Minelli was walking away beside the girl.

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CO-OPERATIVE CAT

A gondola costs about 500,000 lire—say £300, or $840—payable in instalments; and every three weeks or so in summer it must go back to the yards to be scraped of weed and tarred again. Since the gondoliers are largely unemployed in the winter months, fares are necessarily high, and every now and then the Gondoliers' Co-operative announces, in a spate of emotional posters, the impending disappearance of the very last gondola from the canals of Venice, unless the municipality agrees to raise the tariff again. In the sixteenth century there were 10,000 gondolas in Venice. Today there are about 400 . . . Even on severely practical grounds, the gondola is still useful to Venetians, for there are eleven gondola ferries across the Grand Canal, three of them working all night (they have gay little shelters, often charmingly decorated with greeneries and Chinese lanterns, in which off-duty gondoliers picturesquely sprawl the hours away, sometimes engaging in desultory argument, or playing with a communal cat.)

JAMES MORRIS, *Venice*

CAMPFIRE STORY

" And then they started talking loud again. My mother said, ' It's time we had a showdown, Mr. Wolf-of-the-Stenographers'-Pool, and with Ellen off to camp in the morning, now's the time to do it. If you think I'm going to spend another summer in this muggy exurbanite hole while you high-tail it off to town every morning to prowl around your office harem and live it up on your fancy air-conditioned expense account, you've got another think coming . . .' "

Drawing by Whitney Darrow Jr.
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THE OLD ADAM

His eyes palpitated out on her
in dark tumult

BY RHYS DAVIES

SCANDALS never disturb the placidity of Clawdd, and everybody was put about when Jane Morgan, unwittingly or not, began one by taking a simple bathe on a beautiful Saturday afternoon in July. The distressing affair was the more out of key because Clawdd, which lies in one of the most secluded valleys of Wales, is noted for its small but old-established theological college. Otherwise the place has little to recommend it except the several pure waterfalls and a breed of sheep which, nurtured on moistly succulent pastures, becomes the tenderest mutton in the land.

Jane took the bathe in a pool formed by the river in a glade just below her home, outside the village. Fishing rights in the stretch of river tumbling thereabouts belonged to her bad-tempered mother, who rented them by the season to rich anglers coming from elsewhere. But it was not true—as alleged, that evening, by one critic in The Hawk Inn—that Jane had been set bathing in the pool by her mother as a trap. She enjoyed lolling about in out-of-doors water.

She was twenty, and although in school she had been ferocious at all energetic sports, indolence lately had begun to undo her. After climbing out of the pool she took a long time over drying herself, standing on the daisy-sprinkled bank. Rather heavy-jowled for her age, and her small grey eyes lapsed too far in, nevertheless she owned a well-off body such as is seen, as a rule, only on a plinth in a museum or, alive in a slip, being chosen for first prize at a seaside fête while the brass band waits to strike up.

Presently she lay down, forgetting that her mother had asked her to pluck a capon killed the day before—a teacher from Marlais was coming to a meal on Sunday. Her amiable spaniel, a bird or two, and a few droning bees seemed to be her sole companions in enjoyment of the purring sunshine. She was on her mother's enclosed land, and no anglers had arrived that afternoon.

She was not lying there for the sake of health or beauty, either,

for in ancient Clawdd, which possesses two valiantly thriving chapels, as well as the esteemed theological college, the up-to-date manias for sun-therapy and tinting the flesh are not thought about. Innocent of those fads as a nymph of the old dispensation, Jane dozed off among the daisies.

The spaniel's sudden bark wakened her. She scrambled up and, for a moment, stood poised with wonderfully graceful alertness. The dog, wagging its tail, was ambling to the trunk of a venerable oak which cast shade twelve yards distant up the glade. Jane let out the hallooing cry foxhunters give; then, swift as a released arrow, she charged towards the tree. She did not stop to snatch up her towel. Sun and sleep—so she told Police Sergeant Pryse later—had addled her senses.

A young man fled—foolishly but perhaps naturally—from behind the tree. Jane's cries increased. They were heard by her mother in the oblong stone house above. *She* told Sergeant Pryse that she had been in the kitchen making blackberry tart and was unaware of her daughter's habit of bathing in the pool. But for some weeks she and Jane had suspected that an intruder haunted their land, especially at night, and the sergeant had been informed of this already. One morning, indeed, Jane had found a spray of wild cherry blossom—too heavy for any bird to have carried—on the windowledge of her bedroom.

Shrieks from an unclothed person in pursuit are more unnerving than from the clothed. The young man completely lost his head. Or was it that he *wished* to be captured? Instead of fleeing downwards to the left, where the public road to the college lay, he dashed upwards. The delighted spaniel barked, chased, and whisked about as if in a game with its own kindred.

Jane, a fine sprinter, got him in a couple of minutes. He had bounded away from a barbed-wire fence enclosing staring sheep in a field rented to a farmer and, just as Mrs. Morgan rounded the house, Jane and the spaniel—not that the dog intended seizing him—cornered him where a barn joined the low wall of a disused paddock. Athletic of physique, Jane not only cornered him but leapt and brought him down under her. His head bumped against the stone cobblēs.

She scrambled up. "I know him," she shouted to her mother, whose own daunting jaw was champing soundlessly as she drew up. "He was skulking behind a tree." A bubble broke at the corner of Jane's mouth. "I've seen him in chapel!" She looked down at him with the victorious gaze a hunter gives to captured prey. "His name is Tudor . . . Tudor . . . ?"

"Edwards," supplied the supine young man, in a mumble. He looked gone into a condition of total submission, perhaps because

of the bumping. But his eyes palpitated out on her in dark tumult.

Mrs. Morgan, understandably, untied her kitchen apron to give her daughter before she found speech.

"If there was a whip—" she panted, looking round at the horseless paddock, long fallen to rack and ruin because of the sloths, dissipations, and debts of her recently deceased husband. She turned to the villain—he still lay on the cobbles, as if shocked to the core—and her tone was grim as her eye. "You'll be hearing more of this!"

Jane should have run off, the apron not being enough, but she had remained looking down intently at her capture. Her mother gave her a push and, accompanied by the slavering dog, they left Tudor Edwards where he lay. He was a native of Clawdd, but he and Jane had never spoken to each other; and in this unseemly way his wooing came to flower.

Of course, the disagreeable event became common property by that evening, though muddling gossip, at first, spread that the culprit was a resident student—some of them came from England—in the college. No one wanted to believe that a son of Clawdd could forget himself so far.

"There's bound to be a goat even in a little college like ours," remarked Emlyn Prichard, in the saloon bar of The Hawk.

"Students are not proper until they've passed their examinations," said elderly Blodwen Lewis who, as barmaid, was the only woman allowed to tread the saloon.

"Perhaps the student just wanted to do a bit of poaching," Llewellyn Morris ventured.

"Traps," frowned Ewart Vaughan, who had been fined a pound in his time for landing a salmon, undersized though it was. "I expect Jane Morgan was put there as a trap to cast spells."

Did he mean a trap to catch poachers or to dazzle a student or licensed angler for mother or daughter's own purpose?

They were debating this when at about nine T.D. Watkins, owner of the flannel mill and a close friend of Sergeant Pryse, came in and gave the facts.

"No," he replied to dismayed inquirers on the stools and benches, "Tudor isn't handcuffed or in a cell. But it's serious. Owing to the college."

"What was Jane doing—" Ewart Vaughan asked insinuatingly, and was not answered—"sleeping like that in the glade? Trees full of leaves don't hide everything—no, not even when they're fig leaves."

Since Sergeant Pryse didn't come into the saloon for his

customary refreshment, the affair certainly looked important, and, after ten o'clock closing time, men whose way led past the police station shivered in sympathy for Tudor. Such is the solidarity of old communities. But no one had given credit to the Morgans for their courage in going to the police and thus making public that, private land though she was on, Jane bathed and lay about in that state.

Tudor, after being hauled out of his mother's cottage three hours earlier, was still inside the police station. He was sipping a cup of tea, an obstinate scowl on his face. Now and again he stroked the back of his head, where a lump had grown to the size of a bantam's egg.

Sergeant Pryse, also with tea, sat irritably making corrections on long sheets of ruled blue paper on his desk. He had wanted to deduct a year from Tudor's exact age. Twenty, and of full stature bodily, nevertheless the face of the accused showed that he had not yet quite emerged from those lunar thickets of youth where incalculable creatures roam bemused, sometimes stamping their hoofs in fury.

Pryse suddenly pounced. "Sunday, May 1st, you said it was? Well, May 1st wasn't a Sunday! You're telling me lies."

"It was a Sunday night," Tudor maintained. "I had been looking at her in chapel that evening, and I heard the clock in the college tower strike twelve when I took the ladder out of the Morgans' barn. The moon was full and the blossom was out. It was the first time I had gone there, and I remember thinking, It's the first day of May."

"You weren't safe in bed dreaming you did this?" suggested Pryse enticingly.

Tudor shook his head. He had told Pryse of behaviour which need not have been applied to that day's offence of loitering on enclosed land. In the dead of night (that is, for Clawdd) when no other soul was outside the sheets, he had gone to the Morgan house and climbed a ladder to the window of Jane's bedroom. But all he had done afterwards was to sit for a while on the windowledge.

"What did you say your motive was?" the sergeant pressed, returning to this bewildering idiosyncrasy for the third time.

"I just fancied sitting there. The curtains were closed, but I was hoping they wouldn't be and Miss Morgan would come to the window and speak to me."

"To ask if the fine weather was going to change, I expect?" Pryse blew angrily on his tea-damp moustache. "I wouldn't be surprised," he said, going beyond his jurisdiction, "if Mrs. Morgan would say you were after her silver, not her daughter.

Do you appreciate you could be had up for trying to break in?"

"They haven't got any money. I'll be the one with money after my mother is gone."

The long interview had got out of hand once or twice. From its start, Pryse, doubtless with Clawdd's prestige in view, had done his utmost to entice Tudor into admitting that really it was salmon he was after.

"No." Tudor, adamant on the point, spurned this reiterated blandishment to the end. "No, I do not know anything about salmon, and I never want to eat it any time of the year."

"Anyone would think," Pryse grumbled, "you've had your gumption knocked out of your head by bumping it on those cobbles."

He looked over the heavily corrected foolscap, and grieved, "As far as I can tell now, the charge will be breach of the peace. Your dad wouldn't have liked this."

And after a final version of his statement was read to the accused he signed it and was freed into the moonlit night.

When he got home, his mother didn't ask him why he had done this prank or what was the point of it when he could have approached Jane in a more normal way especially since the girl attended the same chapel. She laid a poultice on his swelling, then drew a starched cloth off a tray of cold food.

"Now, eat the meat and pickles slowly," she said, "or you'll be having nightmares tonight." She resumed her knitting, sitting in the rocking-chair in which her only child used to be sung to sleep. A small woman with a politely mild face and a voice that rarely darted up into anger, she had never got too big for her boots, though her husband, a builder's repairs man when she married him at eighteen, had later done well for himself in buying up old properties in Marlais, the nearby town. But a policeman—and on such an errand!—had never darkened her threshold before. Her knitting was faster than usual.

"Mam," Tudor said, the meal rapidly finished, "I'll have to stand up in court next week."

"I am surprised you have let yourself be gone on Jane Morgan," she commented. "There's half a dozen good-minded girls in Clawdd would be glad to know you've clapped eyes on them."

He pondered, and said meekly, "Well, I thought to myself, Jane's like me, the same age and with only a widowed mother and no brothers and sisters. Except she's got no money. The four of us, I thought, could sit here in Clawdd in comfort, with Jane fetching the rents like you after you're gone."

Every first of the month his mother went off unobtrusively to Marlais and collected the rents of eight houses which had been expertly renovated by his father.

Although admiring his sentiment, she objected, " That mother of hers is a proud one; front and back, and Jane's got the same mighty way of walking. If you had been a young man from the college, very likely Jane would have taken you into the house to tea when she found you on their land."

" Yes," he sighed, after another gloomy pause, " I ought to have gone to a teachers' college and been made a B.A."

Still not showing signs of being very cast down, she said, " While you were in the police station I thought I ought to go and plead with Mrs. Morgan and Jane not to let this business go any further."

Tudor reared up, thunderstruck. "*No.*"

She nodded approvingly, briskly stuck her needles into the ball of wool, and said, " Mind you don't do anything foolish after this. Men have drowned themselves over women. But not men with full-weight heads."

She knew better than to upbraid him in dire terms. He was not a wild one, but had always gone his own way. Stubborn against his father's wish to educate him for work entailing pomp and circumstance, he had dropped school as soon as the law allowed and begun work as a ploughboy on one of the ancestral local farms, where he had quickly progressed. He was able to judge a cow or ewe at market expertly. With help from her, he could buy a farm of his own presently; there was a plan that they would acquire one owned by an ageing relative in North Wales, far over the mountains. And nothing had seemed to rankle in him until lately.

" I won't be going to chapel tomorrow," he said, as midnight put an end to the disastrous Saturday. Never loquacious, he went up to bed.

Supporters and inquisitive natives of Clawdd who were able to attend the court in Marlais travelled the seven miles by bus, car, and bike; dressed in best clothes, the contingent was of sufficient strength for a distinct odour of camphor balls to fill the eighteenth-century courtroom. Mrs. Morgan and her daughter were there, although told they would not be called to witness, since the accused was pleading guilty.

Tudor's case was the last of the morning's ration of district ill-doings, which had included theft of a sheep, assault and battery during a Saturday night brawl in Marlais, and a summons concerning the father of a bastard. " It is unusual for us to find

such a charge as this one from Clawdd," began the chairman ominously, after Tudor was called to the dock. It was a hint that the good status of the village was in jeopardy.

But of the three magistrates on the bench, one was a woman. She was comfortably stout, wore flashing, very observant glasses, and it soon became clear that she was dubious of the case. That Tudor was pleading guilty shortened the proceedings; but nevertheless, after Sergeant Pryse had related the arrest and admissions of the accused, this Mrs. Ellen Jones, J.P., bristled.

"Boiled down," she said, "what is this charge but the paltry misdemeanour of a lovesick farmhand? Why, not a hundred years ago there was a custom in these parts of a suitor being admitted to a young lady's room from a ladder at night, and such courtships were acceptable to families of the best repute. A young man was trusted in those simple days—but God help him if he betrayed that trust! The accused may have heard of this custom of our respected forefathers and—"

"We are not living a hundred years ago," interrupted the chairman rudely.

He took a long, beady look at the accused. Tudor's mother had insisted that he wore a starched white collar and the black suit—now very tight—bought for his father's funeral. But the effect of respectability was spoilt by his obstinate scowl—due, perhaps, to the presence of Jane. A tuft of unruly hair shoved down on his forehead somehow added to the surliness. Yet Mrs. Ellen Jones, also giving him a scrutiny, seemed even more impatient that the charge had been brought. She jerked about in her seat. But she had two against her.

"What were your intentions towards Miss Morgan?" the chairman demanded.

"To see her," Tudor replied, not using "sir."

"We know that," sniffed the other male beak cynically. "Were you aware that she was in the habit of bathing in her private pool?"

"Yes."

"Ha!" said the two men almost simultaneously.

And the elderly one commented, "To stare at an unrobed young lady for forty-five minutes from behind a tree in broad daylight shows a very warped mentality, to say the least."

"This sitting on her windowledge late at night," Mrs. Ellen Jones persisted encouragingly. "What were your intentions in that?"

"Only to sit outside her room, Your Worship."

The chairman barked, "*Not* to go inside, of course, of course. Stand down."

Mrs. Jones pouted at the short-shrift chairman; but she gave way. No doubt the chairman thought this was a case men could judge best. The three consulted together in lowered voices. Then the chairman announced judgment. A very old law—it was the Peeping Tom Act of 1361—was quoted to the extreme detriment of the accused. But on account of his youth and previously unblemished character he was to be let off lightly. "You are fined fifteen shillings," the chairman told him, "and I warn you not to let us see you here again." The court closed, and the smell of mothballs evaporated.

Opinion in The Hawk Inn that evening was that the charge would have been dismissed if the theological college hadn't been part of Clawdd. Sergeant Pryse openly remarked, "I did my best to make him see sense. He could have pleaded to me he had bad eyesight and thought it was a big fish dipping about in that pool."

But the damage was done. He had stood in a dock of malefactors; his name had gone down in police records. On the other hand, his behaviour certainly got him Jane's awareness in full measure.

He went about in a watchfully saturnine way, like a man who waits to pick a quarrel with anyone. He bit his nails, shaved less often, didn't take to drinking, and went for morose walks on his own in the evenings, sometimes carrying his licensed gun for rabbiting. Either the gnawing beetle of love hadn't been killed by the magistrates or else he was belatedly feeling the disgrace of the prosecution.

His mother made efforts to repair him: she baked his favourite dishes and, in a roundabout way, drew his attention to several Clawdd girls who were in the pink of condition. He scowled down his strong nose and had nothing to say. And on the first Sunday after the court appearance he became difficult just as they were about to leave for chapel.

"I'm going to become an atheist," he announced, resolutely sitting down.

"There's plenty of those in our chapel," she said, pulling on lace gloves. "I wouldn't try to coax you if it wasn't that Mrs. Morgan and Jane are sure to be there—and won't they be glad they've driven you from where your dear father was made a deacon the year before he died!"

"I can't help staring at Jane right through the sermon," he lamented.

"Well, stare at her," she said firmly, and gave him the hymn-book they always shared. "Though what there's left to stare at I can't think."

Owing to his humming and hawing they were the last to enter the full chapel. Their seats were a good way down, on a raised side-portion where the pews stood crosswise to the middle ones. The ghost of a commotion stirred the air. Jane, sitting in a middle pew, was observed to lower her head. As soon as mother and son were seated, the organ, played by Ewart Vaughan, burst into a Handel piece like a fanfare of trumpets. Until the Reverend A. C. Powys, D.D., opened with his prayer, it was unavoidable that most people couldn't help thinking of Jane lying in a Garden of Eden state beside her pool. It was a brief ordeal endured not only by the characters most concerned.

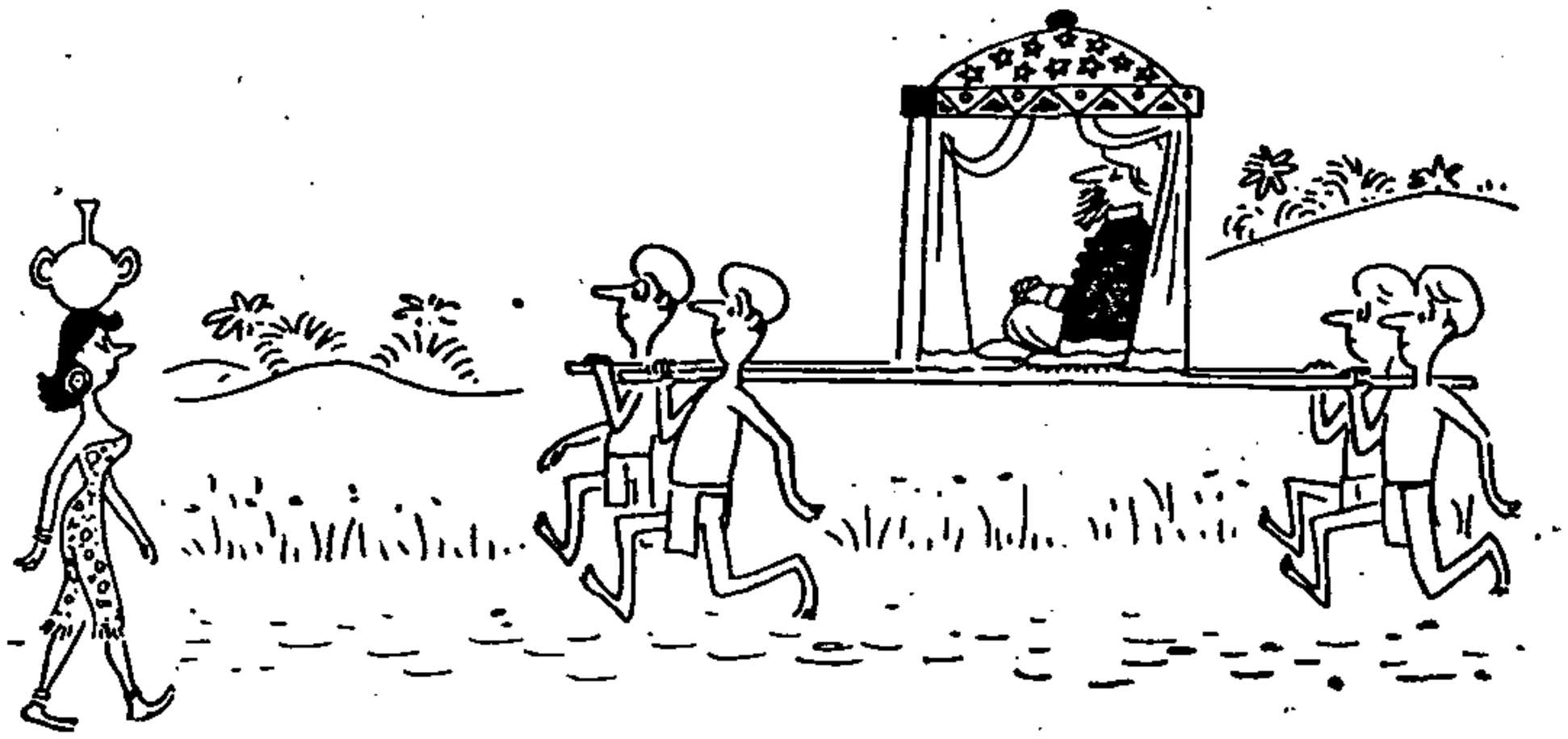
"Things will be easier for you from now," his mother comforted him when they got home. "Soon everything will be forgotten."

He pursed his lips. But, as on that Sunday, he succeeded in keeping his gaze away from Jane's direction. Her seat, though, was so placed that her small, gone-in eyes could rest on her melancholy victim without a turn of her head.

And in small country places even the bitterest enemies are likely, sooner or later, to come face to face at a quiet spot. One evening in August, as he neared a humped stone bridge over the river, about a mile from the village, Jane came looming up towards him from the other side. The puce after-tint of sunset had not yet darkened into night, and a sickle moon lay flimsy above the lonely woodlands.

Her spaniel, running ahead, recognised Tudor instantly and offered a saluting leap and lick; he bent to return the greeting with a pat. Jane, in a thin low-cut dress because of the warmth, halted when she got a step past him on the shady bridge, and turned.

"Tudor Edwards," she said, "I forgive you." She put her



head on one side and prattled, " It was my mother that took me to the police." He carried his gun, and a limp rabbit was slung over his shoulder; since he said nothing, she asked chattily, " Been rabbiting? "

He took the rabbit from his shoulder, looked at it in great surprise, and exclaimed, " Why, it was a salmon just before I came on this bridge! "

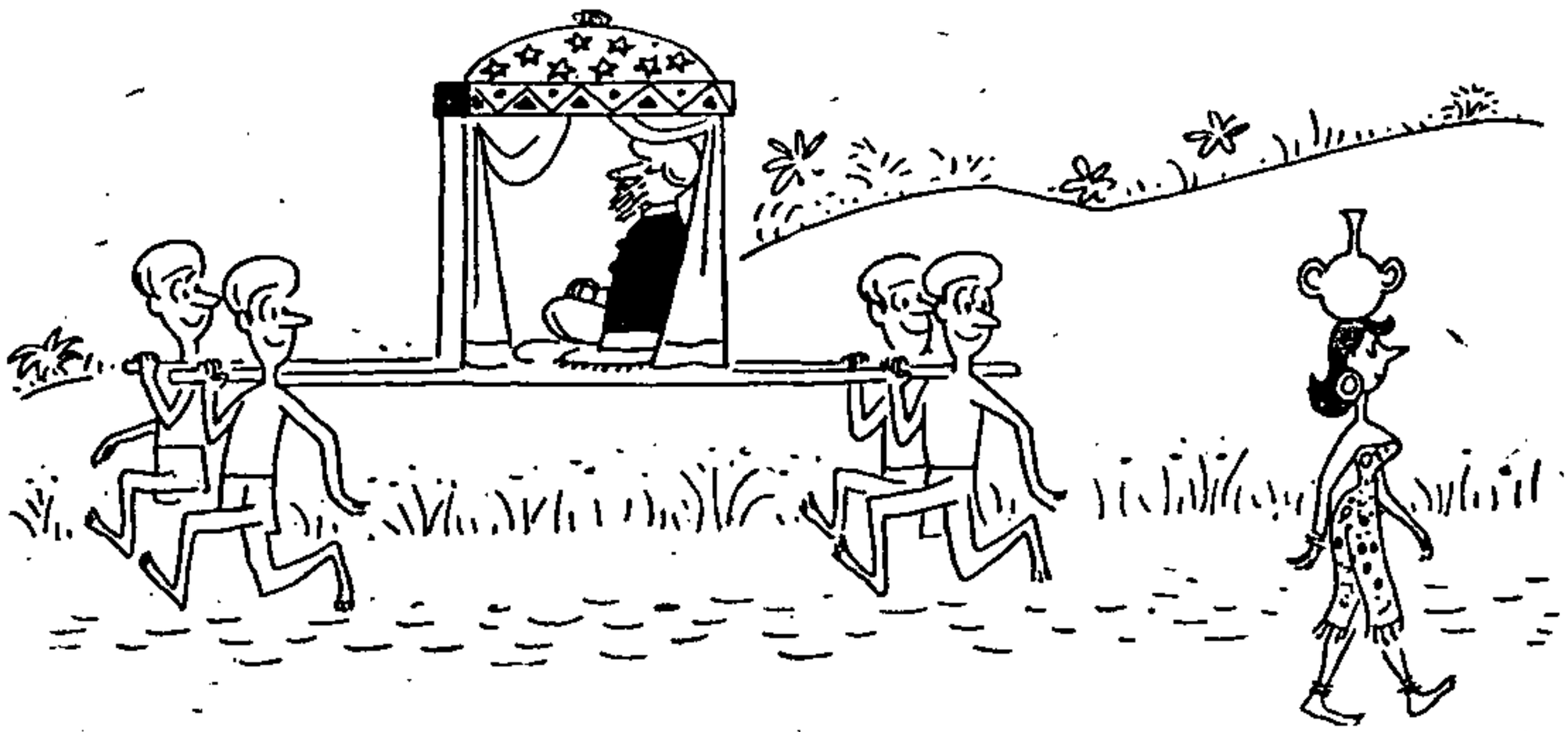
Jane fingered a string of coral pearls round her tawny, firm-rooted throat, and found herself able to smile. " Oh well," she said, " strange things happen every night and day, don't they? " No apparition, her goddess figure stood clear-cut in the twilight. Her face was wonderfully tanned from all the sunshine of that good summer.

" Going for—for a walk? " he asked, stammering over it.

Only a fortnight after this meeting, the two widows sat in formal conclave down in Mrs. Edwards' obscure cottage by Three Saints' Well.

Mrs. Morgan had called with the bygone manner—to which, in any case, she was not entitled—of a squire's lady bringing bounty to the hard-pressed. But, since the police proceedings, she had learnt all about quiet Mrs. Edwards' inherited Marlais properties, now much enhanced in value. Living just the same as when she was married, and still baking her own bread in a hearth oven with a Jehovah among wheatsheaves design on its iron door, Mrs. Edwards never bought a coat or hat which made other women think.

" I'll be truthful and say he'd not be of my choosing," Mrs. Morgan said, a few cool politenesses over. " But times have changed. All this week Jane has been leading me a fine dance. Laying down the law to me—" She hastened from this tactless



phrase. "She says it's true love on both sides and the bit of trouble in July made it plain to her."

"I'll be truthful, too," Tudor's mother said, "and say we women can't properly understand what a man sees when he looks at us."

Mrs. Morgan seemed about to be contentious. But she changed the subject. "Now, what about money? A farmhand doesn't earn much. It's not his intention to stay one all his life?"

"Tudor earns the full union rate and he'll get what I've got when I'm gone."

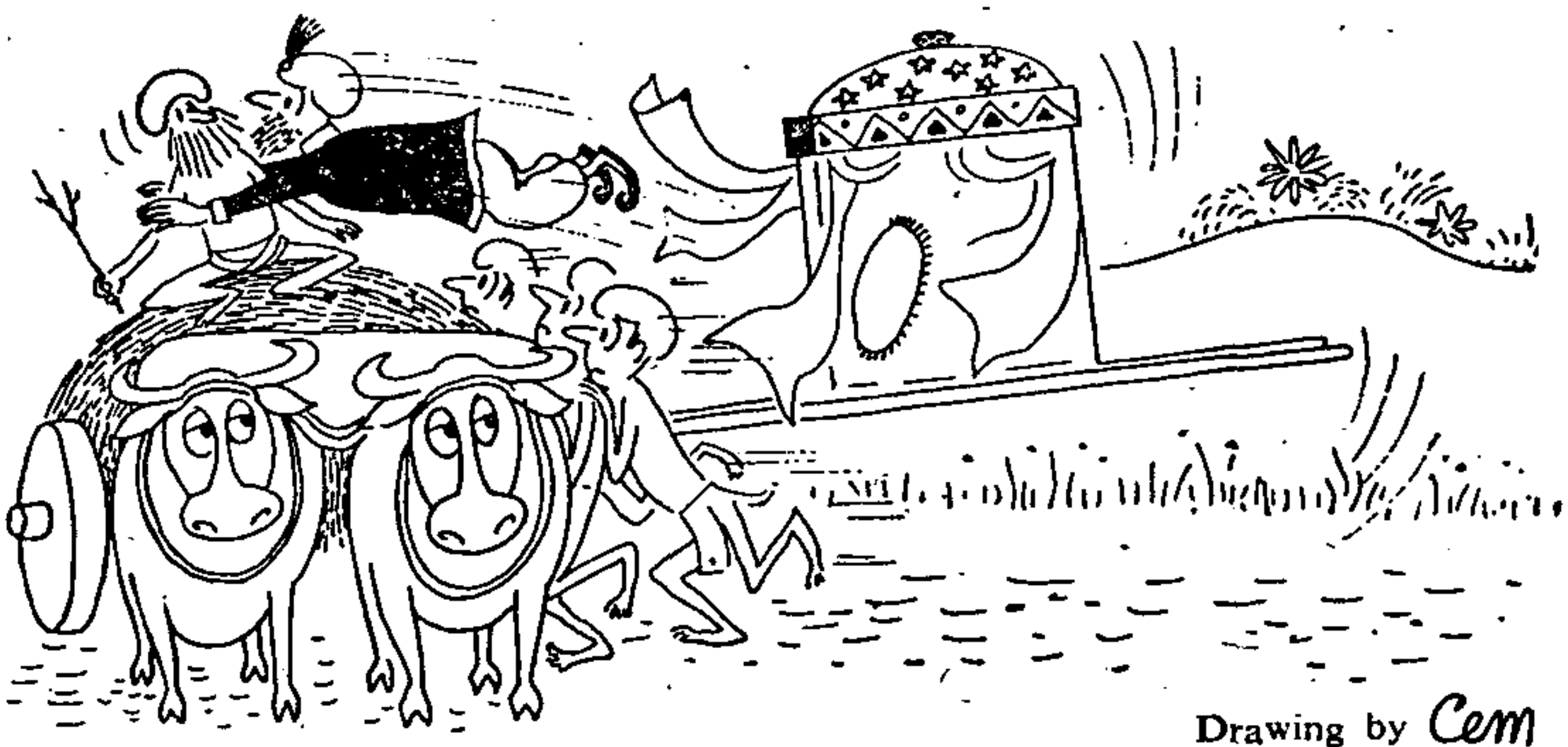
"You're only about fifty," Jane's mother quibbled. "Mrs. Powys mentioned to me that you've got several houses in Marlais."

Mrs. Edwards took deep thought for a minute, while the visitor took admiring stock of the treasure-packed room. There were valuable painted glass plaques and Swansea plates on the walls, the furniture was of old black oak, and there were china effigies, including one of the young Queen Victoria and one of Christmas Evans, the famous divine whose single eye—the other one was covered with a black patch all his preaching life—had done the work of forty scarifying orbs. Mrs. Morgan, who knew about the value of such items, had been forced to sell most of her own household rarities.

"I've always told Tudor," his mother said at last, "that I'll give him the deeds of three houses in Marlais when he marries. His father wished that. He'll get everything else when I'm gone."

"Surely he should be given *four* houses?" demanded Mrs. Morgan. "Half the total number would be sensible and just."

"His father said three," Mrs. Edwards said quietly. "Three it will be."



Drawing by Cem

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"And you won't marry again?" Mrs. Morgan asked, in a tone of wanting to exact a strict promise.

"Your daughter," inquired Mrs. Edwards, getting up, "has made a list of conditions like these?"

The visitor took the hint to mind her own business, rose, praised the Staffordshire effigies, and departed. Mrs. Edwards felt obliged to take a glass of elderberry wine after the exit.

But Tudor, when he arrived home from work, attached no importance to the fussy interview. "We'll manage her," he said affably. "Jane is marrying me, not three houses. You and I will talk about the houses when I've settled down after the wedding." And at eight o'clock, his black hair perfumed, he went out for his courting walk.

As if to make up for lost time, he began to meet Jane nearly every night for these walks; and on the occasional free evening he went up to The Hawk and drank more than he should.

At home he was loquacious after the walks.

"Jane wants a motor car and an electric vacuum cleaner for when I've got my own farm," he said, in an engrossed and approving way. "Her mother's got her eye on old Will Mansel's place."

"There'll be a big mortgage to raise for Will Mansel's farm," she said, looking at him in doubt.

"Where there's a will there's a way," he grinned.

A man in love—especially one who has suffered prosecution for it—must be allowed his excesses. Despite the extraordinary prank which had led to the police court, she had faith in his good sense asserting itself when the humdrum of married life would pass like a steamroller over this wildness. She even accepted the decision for a wedding as early as October; from a social point of view perhaps it was best for the July blemish to be wiped out as soon as possible.

"We're going to London for the honeymoon," he announced, returned from another of the walks. That night he had arrived home with the manner of a circus man who can leap a galloping horse and jump through hoops of fire with bragging ease.

"London!" she protested. It might have been Baghdad. "You ought to go to North Wales and visit my cousin Ellis at his farm. If he likes the shape of things in this wedding he might let you have the farm cheaper when he's ready to sell."

"Jane," he said, smiling, "wants to see shops in London. She doesn't know anything about Cousin Ellis' farm. Time enough for seeing about that later."

It was her only protest. And in addition to the three houses, she decided to give the couple two pairs of linen bedsheets, a

tapestry quilt made by eighty-year-old Jessie James, whose products lasted for ever, and, as a reminder of the sterner matters of life, the china statue of Christmas Evans. These articles she sent up, like the true Christian she was, to Mrs. Morgan's house on the day before the wedding. Jane wanted him to live there until the three Marlais houses were sold and he bought a farm. To this he had readily agreed.

"I'm going to be master," he assured his doubting but uninterfering mother. "Mrs. Morgan has trod on me once."

"Some of the boys want to give me good wishes in The Hawk," he said, at about one on that fine Saturday afternoon. "So I'll be off now. See you in the chapel."

"It's last night they ought to have done that!" his mother expostulated. "You'll be smelling in the chapel." She was hurt that he was allowing her to proceed there alone, though it was only a short distance and no car had been hired.

He promised not to allow the wellwishers to incommode him, praised her silk dress, and went off up the lane of russet trees. Did he need drink and male jests to give him courage after all? But he hadn't been at all jumpy or excited during the morning, and at noon had eaten a substantial meal, then put a purple Michaelmas daisy in the buttonhole of his expensive new suit, and oil on his fresh-cut hair.

So that as many people as possible could go to the chapel, the ceremony was fixed for a quarter past two. Clawdd, on the whole, was pleased about the marriage. The Morgans, though stiff-necked, were as much true local stock as the Edwardses; it wasn't as if strangers had upset the place by calling the law to Tudor's conduct. And it seemed a pretty development of logic that his offence should now be reduced to something seen through the clean circle of a wedding ring.

Just after two, closing-time in The Hawk, a dozen or so men crossed the road to pay respects by attending. The unusual courtship had brought in other people besides formally invited guests. The groom's mother sat alone in her pew. Jane, with her mother and a male escort from Marlais, waited in the vestry for Tudor's arrival. He should have been standing by the vase of white chrysanthemums under the pulpit, and at twenty-five past two the Reverend A. C. Powys came out of the vestry, crossed to Mrs. Edwards, and asked why her son was late.

"He left home at one o'clock to go up to The Hawk," she mumbled, very flustered.

There was a tightening of silence among the congregation when, a few minutes later, she was called into the vestry. It had

been easy to discover that Tudor hadn't visited The Hawk. And his mother, eyes as agog as everybody's, had barely entered the vestry when Blodwen Lewis, the barmaid, hastened in with her gaping nephew, a boy of ten who was still carrying a glass jar with a huge frog in it.

"I saw Tudor Edwards running on the river bank about half an hour ago," he blabbed, encouraged to it by his aunt. "He had a bag and went climbing up to Howell's Spout."

Everybody knew that at a quarter past two a bus to Marlais and its railway station passed the Howell's Spout crossroads, outside the village.

"His new bag," declared his mother, at once, "was in my house when I left. Packed ready for London. Green canvas."

Cross-examination of the boy revealed that it was the same bag. "Then he must have gone back to the house to fetch it!" deduced the reverend cleverly. But he was distracted at the prospect of nasty vendetta developing between two valued families of his flock.

Jane, sitting on a hard chair in a flounced-out dress of pearly grey, did not swoon. She gazed fixedly into the air, her solid jaw dropped. Mrs. Morgan pranced about on high heels that made her sway. But because of the sacred nature of the adjoining edifice, rising tempers had been kept in check. Then the minister returned from announcing to the congregation that the ceremony was postponed.

"Tudor is gone out of his mind and is wandering!" the groom's mother cried—her distress so wholehearted that no one could accuse her of a taunt as she gasped, "Tell the police!"

"Postponed?" the bride's mother burst out, while the minister poured a glass of water for her silent daughter. "He'd marry her across my dead body!"

The reverend quickly took out his watch. "Baptism of the Leyshons' baby is in fifteen minutes," he said, more peremptorily than was usual with him. "So now I must get ready in quiet, please."

Opinion in The Hawk, early that evening, was cautious. No one denounced Tudor, and neither was he praised. Dirty tricks should not be countenanced, but it was in vain to sit in judgment on the eternal slipperiness of love; as well sit on the meaning of the vanishing rainbow or a kingfisher's flight down a stream.

Sergeant Pryse said, "His mother hasn't reported to me that he's missing, and till she does that I don't know anything." Always a sign that he was speaking as an ordinary man, he laid his helmet on the bar counter. "People say a fellow can't help

skulking back to where he's done a deed, but I daresay we won't be seeing Tudor in these parts again. It's been the old Adam coming out in him today. He grew up on that day in court."

"Old Adam fiddlesticks!" sniffed the listening barmaid, who didn't care much for Pryse. "It's hard on his poor mother—*she'll* be here, bearing the brunt. I expect she's collapsing in her cottage, and if *I* was a policeman I'd be down there finding out what I could."

But the absconder's mother wasn't really collapsing. She had found a token of his esteem in an envelope on her dressing-table when, still panting a little, she had gone upstairs to change into everyday clothes. He never had been a boy to write letters and, in his outsize scrawl, all he said was:

> Dear Mam, I am catching the three o'clock train in Marlais and I will be looking over Cousin Ellis' farm before dark. You see, Mam, I thought to myself how Jane and her mother liked to show off and have things done for all the people of Clawdd to see, same as before the magistrates in court last July. So they can do the same today. Jane asked me for twenty-five pounds to help to buy her clothes for today, and I gave it. So I haven't robbed her—not of money. She bought a fine dress. I didn't tell you about this because you had been very upset when they wanted four houses, and I was upset too and I began to make up my mind about today then. Jane pretended. From Tudor.

Unable to laugh or weep, she sat for a while in reverie. He had known she would not have allowed him to do the act of that day! No good woman would have approved of it. Yet she couldn't help admiring its angry rigour now. A young man worth his salt mustn't be a worshipping angel all the time. How stupid of Jane to let herself ask for cash before the permission of marriage! And how that day had been a high-priced one for everybody concerned! She stroked the lovely silk of her own dress.

After giving the Morgans decent time to recover, she put on the costly hat bought for the wedding and went up to their house. Opening the porch door, off which the paint was flaking, Mrs. Morgan admitted the silent visitor. "Where is he?" she demanded, as they went into a room off the gloomy hall. "I'll track him to the ends of the earth!"

A three-tiered cake, a whole ham, dishes of sandwiches, small pies, and bottles of drink were spread on a white-clothed table. Tudor's mother looked at these festive things in horror. Why hadn't they been put out of sight?

"The expense I've gone to!" Mrs. Morgan continued her bombast. "But I'll get every penny back!"

Mrs. Edwards glanced at a board erected on trestles in a corner; on it were displayed the wedding gifts, which included two clocks not yet going, a set of saucepans, an electric iron, and a tea-cosy. "Your daughter?" she asked, looking about her in the fading light.

"Jane, come down," Mrs. Morgan shouted into the hall. "His mother's here."

She came in at a run, wearing a crumpled new dressing-gown as if she had been lying on her bed. "He's come back?" she panted, excited breasts prominent in the gown.

Mrs. Edwards shook her head. "I wouldn't be surprised to hear he's gone to join the Army," she said.

Jane sank to a chair. "I'll sue him for breach of promise," she said in a low, sullen voice.

"Tudor's got no money or property to pay for breach of promise. The business of the three houses was put off till you were settled." Mrs. Edwards took a long breath, turned her back on Mrs. Morgan, and addressed Jane. "I have come to say I am sorry. Tudor is a boy that gets queer notions. I have noticed that when the moon is rising—"

"The moon's got nothing to do with it." Mrs. Morgan cut into what seemed the beginning of a long speech of humble defence. "The plain fact is that he's a born clod and needs a good thrashing."

"Then what he's done is best for Jane's future," Mrs. Edwards said, still meek.

Jane's face became mottled, and her hands seemed to be trying to push an awful outburst back down her shapely bosom. She succeeded, and only exclaimed, "You've been in league with him, you humbug!"

Mrs. Edwards looked at Jane's foreshadowing chin, and at the face that perhaps had been eased by true love. But love hadn't been allowed to drive out less pleasing forces in her. After this scrutiny, she asked, "Would I have paid twelve pounds for this silk dress if I knew what he was going to do? And three pounds for this hat?" She crossed to the display of gifts and picked up Christmas Evans. "Would I have given you *this*, and the sheets and quilt?" She held aloft the effigy of the celebrated divine. "I swear by Christmas Evans that I did *not* know!"

"Put that ornament back!" commanded Mrs. Morgan, stepping to her.

Mrs. Edwards held it against her chest. "It was one of *my* wedding presents," she said, and suddenly her demeanour became so steely and menacing that Mrs. Morgan, as if fearing Christmas Evans would be smashed on her head, shrank back.

"You can keep the linen bedsheets and the seven-guinea quilt, in memory," the visitor said, and walked out of the house unmolested.

She did not uproot herself from Clawdd for several months, occupied with the business of selling her cottage. And Jane did not sue for breach of promise. With their ferretings into personal details and idyllic things that often take place—at least, in Clawdd—under trees in lonely woodlands or on a sweet river bank, when only bats or an owl are unbiased witnesses, such lawsuits can be undignified as well as costly to pocket and reputation.

But she got her reward for this self-discipline. In due course a youngish schoolmaster in Marlais stood beside her under the pulpit. A sound man, he was a B.A., played cricket and football, and tore about ancient Clawdd on a roaring motor-scooter, Jane proudly erect behind him like a goddess coping with up-to-date things. But he was not the sort to relish a girl who forgot delicacy so far as to rush to a public court over a love affair gone wrong.

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FLOORED

I was standing in the elevator of the Thalberg Building one day when Greta Garbo entered. She was then at the peak of her career, acknowledged by all as the greatest movie star of the day.

Miss Garbo was wearing a hat approximately the size of a large manhole cover. The rest of her was encased in slacks and a mannish-type coat. I was standing behind her and, being in a playful mood, I gently lifted the back of her hat.

Thinking back on the incident, I can see the result of lifting the back of a woman's hat is inevitable: the front of the hat slides down over her face. At the time, however, I had not thoroughly worked out this problem in physics.

Miss Garbo turned on me in a rage, angrily pulling up the hat and revealing the classic features that are still admired by millions. "How *dare* you?" she exclaimed in icy tones.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," I replied. "I thought you were a fellow I knew from Kansas City."

No further words were exchanged. But it is pretty obvious to any student of the cinema that this is the real explanation of why Greta Garbo never appeared in any of The Marx Brothers pictures.

GROUCHO MARX, *Groucho And Me*

Isak Dinesen is the pen-name of Danish Baroness Blixen, who in 1934 created a sensation with her collection of stories, Seven Gothic Tales. She wrote them for her own amusement, first in English, then in Danish. Since then her output of written work has been small but to connoisseurs wildly exciting—it includes three volumes of stories, a book, Out of Africa, about her life on a Kenya coffee plantation, and now its sequel, Shadows on the Grass, from which this story is taken. In Denmark the Baroness is a national figure—it has been said that if she is to speak on radio or television the theatres and cinemas might as well close down for the evening . . .

Barua a Soldani

By Isak Dinesen

READERS of my book *Out of Africa* may remember how, on a New Year's morning, before sunrise—while the stars, on the point of withdrawing and vanishing into the dome of the sky, were still hanging on it like big luminous drops, and the air still had in it the strange limpidity and depth, like well-water, of African dawn—I was driving, together with Denys Finch-Hatton and his Kikuyu chauffeur Kanuthia, along a very bad road in the Masai Reserve, and there shot a lion upon a dead giraffe.

Later on Denys and I were accused of having shot the giraffe, a thing not allowed by the game laws.

I do not know whether the lion had actually killed the giraffe. Lions kill by breaking the necks of their victims, and in view of the height of a giraffe's shoulders and neck the thing seems unlikely. On the other hand the strength and energy of a lion are indeed incredible things, and hunters have solemnly assured me that they have seen giraffes being killed by lions.

The squatters on my farm during the last three months had

been up to the house begging me to shoot a lion *mbaya sana*—very bad—which was following and worrying their herds. The lion that I met this morning and which, even on our close approach, remained on the back of his prey, absorbed in his meal and one with it, and only slightly stirring in the dim air, might well be the very same killer, the cause of so much woe over precious cows and bullocks.

We were about twenty miles from the border of the farm, but a distance of twenty miles means nothing to a lion. If it was him, ought I not to shoot him when he himself gave me the chance?

Denys, as Kanuthia slowed down the car, whispered to me, "You shoot this time." I had not got my own rifle with me, so he handed me his. I was never keen to shoot with his rifle, it was too heavy and in particular too long for me. But my old friend, Uncle Charles Bulpett, had told me, "The person who can take delight in a sweet tune without wanting to learn it, in a beautiful woman without wanting to possess her, or in a magnificent head of game without wanting to shoot it—has not got a human heart." So that the shot, here before daybreak, was in reality a declaration of love—and ought not then the weapon to be of the very first quality?

Or it may be said that hunting is ever a love-affair. The hunter is in love with the game, real hunters are true animal-lovers. But during the hours of the hunt itself he is more than that, he is infatuated with the head of game which he follows and means to make his own—nothing much beside it to him exists in the world . . .

Elephant-hunting is a sport of its own. For the elephant, which through centuries has been the one head of game hunted for profit, in the course of time has adopted man into his scheme of things, with deep distrust. Our nearness to him is a challenge which he will never disregard, he comes towards us, straight and quickly, on his own, a towering, overwhelming structure, massive as cast-iron and lithe as running water. "What time he lifteth up himself on high, the mighty are afraid." Out go his ears like dragon's wings, giving him a grotesque likeness to the small lapdog called a papillon, his formidable trunk, crumpled up accordion-like, rises above us like a lifted scourge. There is passion in our meeting, positiveness on both sides, but on his side there is no pleasure in the adventure, he is driven on by just wrath, and is settling an ancient family feud.

But a lion-hunt every single time is an affair of perfect harmony, of deep, burning, mutual desire and reverence between two truthful and undaunted creatures, on the same wavelength. A lion on the plain bears a greater likeness to ancient monumental

stone lions than to the lion which today you see in a zoo, the sight of him goes straight to the heart.

Gazing back into the past I do, I believe, remember each individual lion I have seen—his coming into the picture, his slow raising or rapid turning of the head, the strange, snakelike swaying of his tail. "Praise be to thee, Lord, for Brother Lion, the which is very calm, with mighty paws, and flows through the flowing grass, red-mouthed, silent, with the roar of the thunder ready in his chest." And he himself, catching sight of me, may have been struck, somewhere under his royal mane by the ring of a similar Te Deum: "Praise be to thee, Lord, for my sister of Europe, who is young, and has come out to me on the plain in the night."

In bygone days the lion was likely to come out of the matter triumphant. Later we have got such effective weapons that the test of strength can hardly be called fair—still I have had more than one friend killed by lions. Nowadays great sportsmen hunt with cameras. The practice started while I was still in Africa, Denys as a white hunter took out millionaires from many countries, and they brought back magnificent pictures—which, however, to my mind (because I do not see eye to eye with the camera) bore less real likeness to their object than the chalk portraits drawn up on the kitchen door by our native porters. It is a more refined sport than shooting, and provided you can make the lion join in the spirit of it you may here, at the end of a pleasant, platonic affair without bloodshed on either side, blow one another a kiss and part like civilised beings. I have no real knowledge of the art—I was a fairly good shot with a rifle, but I cannot take photographs.

When I first came out to Africa I could not live without getting a fine specimen of each single kind of African game. Within my last ten years out there I did not fire a shot except in order to get meat for my natives. It became to me an unreasonable thing, indeed in itself ugly or vulgar, for the sake of a few hours' excitement, to put out a life that belonged in the great landscape and had grown up in it for ten or twenty, or—as in the case of buffalos and elephants—for fifty or a hundred years. But lion-hunting was irresistible to me, I shot my last lion a short time before I left Africa.

As now on this New Year's morning as noiselessly as possible I got down from the car and, through the long wet grass that washed my hands, the rifle and my face, slowly walked closer to the lion, he stirred, rose and stood up immovable, his shoulder towards me, as fine a target for a shot as in the course of a lifetime you would get anywhere in the world.

The sun by now was just below the horizon, the morning sky behind the dark silhouette was clear like liquid gold. I was struck by a thought: I have seen you before, I know you well. But from where? The answer came at once: It is a lion out of the royal coat-of-arms of Denmark, one of our three dark blue lions on gold ground. *Lion passant or*, it is called in the heraldic language, he knows it himself. As I sat down on the ground, got Denys' rifle into position on my knee and took aim, I made a resolution, *If I get this lion, the King of Denmark is to have the skin.*

As the shot fell, booming loudly in the still morning landscape and echoing from the hills, it looked to me as if the lion was carried a couple of feet straight upwards into the air before he came down and collapsed.

He had been hit in the heart, it was as it should be.

I sat and watched Denys and Kanuthia flaying the lion. Going back to that morning after so many years it seems all alive and clear round me, hard to leave once more. I knew then, without reflecting, that I was up at great height, upon the roof of the world, a small figure in the tremendous retort of earth and air, yet one with it. I did not know that I was at the height and upon the roof of my own life.

The grass on the slope where I sat was short as a mowed lawn, the Masai having burnt it off in patches in order to get fresh grazing for their herds, the highland air was intoxicating like wine, the shadows of the vultures ran across my feet.

This lion was an exceptionally fine specimen, what out in his own country they call a black-maned lion, with his thick dark mane growing right back over his shoulderblades. Denys' gunbearer, who had seen many hundred lionskins, declared this one to be the finest he had ever come across. And as in that same spring I was going on a visit to Denmark after four years in Africa, I took the skin with me and on my way, in London, gave it to the firm of Rowland Ward to be cured and set up.

When in Denmark I told my friends that I meant to give King Christian X the lionskin, they laughed at me.

"It is the worst piece of snobbery that we have ever heard of," they said.

"Nay, but you do not understand," I answered them. "You have not lived for a long time outside your own country."

"But what in the world is the King to do with the skin?" they asked. "He does not mean to appear at New Year's levee as Hercules! He will be in despair about it."

"Well," I said, "if the King will be in despair, he will have to be in despair. But I do not think it need come to that, for he

will have some attic at Christiansborg or Amalienborg where he can put it away."

It so happened that they did not have the skin ready by autumn when I was going back to Africa, so that I could not myself present it to the King, but had to leave this privilege to an old uncle of mine who was a chamberlain to the Court. If the King was really in despair about it he hid it very nobly. Some time after my return to the farm I had a kind letter from him, in which he thanked me for his lionskin.

A letter from home always means a lot to people living for a long time out of their country. They will carry it about in their pocket for several days, to take it out from time to time and read it again. A letter from a king will mean more than other letters. I got the King's letter about Christmas-time, and I pictured to myself how the King had sat at his writing-table at Amalienborg, gazing out over a white Amalienborg Square with the snow-clad equestrian statue of his great-great-great-grandfather King Frederic V, in a wig and classic armour, in the midst of it. A short time ago I myself had been part of the Copenhagen world. I stuck the letter into the pocket of my old khaki slacks and rode out on the farm.

The farm-work that I was going to inspect was the clearing of a square piece of woodland where we were to plant coffee, a couple of miles from my house. I rode through the forest, which was still fresh after the short rains. Now once more I was part of the world of Africa.

Half an hour before I went out to the wood-fellers a sad accident had taken place amongst them. A young Kikuyu, whose name was Kitau, had not managed to get away quick enough when a big tree fell, and had had one leg crushed beneath it. At a distance I could already hear his long moan. I speeded up Rouge upon the forest path.

When I came to the place of disaster Kitau's fellow-workers had dragged him out from beneath the fallen tree and laid him on the grass, they were thronging round him there, separating when I came up but standing close by to watch the effect of the catastrophe on me and to hear what I would say about it.

Kitau was lying in a pool of blood, his leg had been smashed above the knee and was sticking out from his body at a grotesque and cruel angle.

I made the wood-fellers hold my horse and sent off a runner to the house to have Farah bring out the car, so that I might drive Kitau to the hospital in Nairobi. But my small car was getting on in years, she rarely consented to run on more than two cylinders and indeed it went against her to be started at all.

With a sinking heart I realised that it would be some time before she came up. While waiting for her I sat with Kitau. The other wood-fellers had withdrawn some distance. Kitau was in great pain, weeping all the time. .

I always had morphia at hand in my house for injured people of the farm carried up there, but here I had neither the medicine nor the syringe. Kitau when he realised that I was with him groaned out dolefully, "*Saidea mimi*—help me—Msabu." And again, "*Saidea mimi.* Give me some of the medicine that helps people," the while groping over my arm and knee.

When out riding on the farm I usually had bits of sugar in my pockets to give to the Totos herding their goats and sheep on the plain and at the sight of me, crying out for sugar. I brought out such bits and fed Kitau with them, he would or could not move his badly bruised hands, and let me place the sugar on his tongue. It was as if this medicine did somehow relieve his pain, his moans, while he had it in his mouth, changed into low whimperings. But my stock of sugar came to an end, and then once more he bégan to wail and writhe, long spasms ran through his body. It is a sad experience to sit by somebody suffering so direly without being able to help, you long to get up and run away or, as with a badly injured animal, to put an end to the anguish—for a moment I believe I looked round for some kind of weapon for the purpose.

Then again came the repeated clock-regular moaning of Kitau, "Have you got no more, Msabu? Have you got nothing more to give me?"

In my distress I once more put my hand into my pocket and felt the King's letter. "Yes, Kitau," I said, "I have got something more. I have got something *mzuri sana*—very excellent indeed. I have got a *Barua a Soldani*—a letter from a king. And that is a thing which all people know, that a letter from a king, *mokone yake*—in his own hand—will do away with all pain, however bad."

At that I laid the King's letter on his chest and my hand upon it. I endeavoured, I believe—out there in the forest, where Kitau and I were as if all alone—to lay the whole of my strength into it.

It was a very strange thing that almost at once the words and the gesture seemed to send an effect through him. His terribly distorted face smoothed out, he closed his eyes.

After a while he again looked up at me. His eyes were so much like those of a small child that cannot yet speak that I was almost surprised when he spoke to me. "Yes," he said. "It is *mzuri*," and again, "yes, it is *mzuri sana*. Keep it there."

When at last the car arrived and we got Kitau lifted on to it, I meant to take my seat at the steering-wheel, but at that he immediately worked himself into a state of the greatest alarm.

"No, Msabu," he said, "Farah can drive the car, you must tell him to do so. You will sit beside me and hold the Barua a Soldani to my chest as before, or otherwise the bad pain will come back at once." So I sat on the boards beside him, and all the way into Nairobi held the King's letter in position.

When we arrived at the hospital Kitau once more closed his eyes and kept them closed, as if refusing to take in any more impressions. But with his left hand on my clothes he made sure that I was beside him while I parleyed with the doctor and the matron. They did indeed allow me to keep close beside him while he was laid on the stretcher, carried into the building and placed on the operating-table, and as long as I saw him he was quiet.

In the hospital they did really manage to set his broken leg. When he got out he could walk, even if he always limped a little.

Later on, in Denmark, I learnt from the King himself that my lionskin had obtained a highly honourable place in the state-room of Christiansborg Castle, with the skin of a polar bear on the other side of the throne.

The rumour spread amongst the squatters of my farm that I had got this Barua a Soldani, with its miracle-working power. They began to come up to my house one by one, warily, to find out more about it—the old women first, mincing about like old hens, turning their heads affectedly to find a grain for their young ones.

Soon they took to carrying up those of their sick who were in bad pain, so that they might have the letter laid on them and for a while be relieved. Later they wanted more. They demanded to borrow the King's letter, for the day or for the day and night, to take with them to the hut for the relief of an old dying grandmother or a small ailing child.

The Barua a Soldani amongst my stock of medicine from the very first was accurately and strictly placed in a category of its own. This decision was taken by the natives themselves without me giving any thought to the matter. It would do away with pain, in this capacity it was infallible, and no ache or pang could hold out against it. But it must be made use of solely in uttermost need.

It did happen from time to time that a patient with a very bad toothache in his misery cried out to me to let him have Barua a Soldani. But his appeal would be met by his surroundings with

grave disapprovement and indignation or with haughty, scornful laughter.

"You!" they cried back to him, "there's nothing the matter with you but that you have got a bad tooth! You can go down to old Juma Bemu and have him pull it out for you. How could you have the King's Letter? Nay, but here is old Kathegu very ill in his hut with long, hard pains in his stomach, and going to die tonight. His small grandson is up here to have Barua a Soldani for him until tomorrow from Msabu. To him she will give it."

By this time I had had a leather bag with a string to it made for the King's Letter. So the small Toto, standing up straight on the terrace, would take the remedy carefully from my hands, hang it round his neck and walk away with his own hands upon it. He would stand up straight on the terrace again next morning. Aye, his grandfather had died at sunrise, but Barua a Soldani had helped him good all night.

I have seen this particular attitude, or this particular mentality, in the dark people in other matters as well. They stood in a particular relation to the ways and conditions of life. There are things which can be done and others which cannot be done, and they fell in with the law, accepting what came with a kind of aloof humility—or pride.

When Fathima, Farah's wife, was to give birth to her first child, she was very ill, for an hour or two those around her, and her mother herself, had given up hope for her. Her mother, an imposing figure in my establishment, had arranged for about a dozen Somali ladies of the first families of Nairobi to be present. They arrived in Aly Khan's mule-traps, looking very lovely and lively, like old Persian pictures, in their long ample skirts and veils, and filled with sympathy and zeal.

The waves of a woman's world closed over Farah's house, at some distance from the huts of my house-boys. Farah himself, grave and more subdued than I had ever seen him, together with all other male creatures of my household, had been shooed a hundred yards away. The women then set to heating up the room in which the birth was taking place to an almost unbearable heat with charcoal in basins and to make the air thick with child-bed incense. I sat out there for a while, half unconscious, not because I imagined that I could be of any use whatever, but because I felt it to be the correct thing, and expected of me.

Fathima was a very lovely creature, with big dark eyes like a doe's, so slim that one wondered where she could possibly be storing her baby, supple in all her movements and in daily life of a risible temper. I felt sorry for her now. The gentle midwives

were busy, bending and again straightening up the girl and from time to time knocking her in the small of the back with their fists as if to knock out the child. For the time that I was there I saw them dealing not only one kind of medicine—a matron amongst them brought along an earthenware dish on the inner side of which a holy man of the town had drawn up, in charcoal, a text from the Koran—the lettering was washed off carefully with water, and the water poured into the mouth of the labouring young woman.

This great event on the farm took place at the time when the Prince of Wales—the present Duke of Windsor—was on his first visit to the country. Among the celebrations in his honour was a concours hippique in Nairobi, and I had entered my Irish pony Poor-Box for the jumping-competition—he was at the moment in training at Limoru. In the midst of the bustle round me and in a moment of things looking very dark, I suddenly called to mind that I had promised to bring over a bag of oats for him there, so I would have to leave for a couple of hours. I drove away sadly, taking Kamante with me in the car.

On the way back from Limoru I came past the French Mission and remembered that the Fathers for some time had been promising me seed of a particular kind of lettuce from France.

As I pulled up the car, Kamante, who during our drive had not said a word, spoke to me. Fathima was a favourite with Kamante, she was the only human being for whose intelligence I had ever heard him express any kind of respect. "Are you," he asked me, "going into the church to beg the lady in there, who is your friend, to help Fathima?" The lady in the church who was my friend, was the Virgin Mary, whose statue Kamante had seen when on Christmas Eve he had accompanied me to midnight mass. I could not very well say no, so I answered yes, and went into the church before going to the refectory. It was cool in the church, and in the face of the highly vulgar papier-mâché statue of the Virgin, with a lily in her hand, there was something soothing and hopeful.

When I came back to my house, Fathima's baby was born, and she herself was doing well. I congratulated her mother and Farah in his forest-exile. The small boy brought into the world that day was Ahamed, called Saufe, who later became a great figure on the farm.

Kamante said to me, "You see, Msabu, it was good that I reminded you to ask the lady who is your friend to help Fathima."

Now one would have imagined that with knowledge of my intimacy with a person of such power, Kamante upon some other occasion would have come back to have me make use of it. But

this never happened. There are things which can be done, and other things which cannot be done. And we who know the laws must fall in with them.

In the course of time, however, my squatters tried to find out more about that King of my own country who had written the letter. They asked me if he was tall, and were here, I believe, still under the impression of the personality of the Prince of Wales, who had dined at the farm, and who had made them wonder at the fact that a person of such great might should be so slim and slight. I was pleased to be able to reply truthfully that there was not a taller man in his kingdom.

They then wanted to know whether the horse on which he rode was more *kali*—fierce—than my own horse Rouge. Then again, if he laughed.

This last must have been a matter of importance to the natives in their relations with us. "Your *kabilla*—your tribe—" they said to me, "is different to those of the other white people. You do not get angry with us as they do. You laugh with us."

I have still got the King's letter. But it is now undecipherable, brown and stiff with blood and matter of long ago.

In a showcase at the Museum of Rosenborg, in Copenhagen, the tourist can see a piece of yellow texture covered with tawny spots. It is the handkerchief of King Christian IV, which the King held to his eyesocket when, in the naval battle of Kolberger Heide three hundred years ago, his eye was smashed by a Swedish shot. A Danish poet of last century has written an enthusiastic ode about these proud edifying marks.

The blood on my sheet of paper is not proud or edifying. It is the blood of a dumb nation. But then the handwriting on it is that of a king, *mokone yake*. No ode will be written about my letter, still today it is, I believe, history as much as the relic of Rosenborg. Within it, in paper and blood, a covenant has been signed between the Europeans and the Africans—no similar document of this same relationship is likely to be drawn up again.

Looking at it I have wondered: "Will anything that I myself have written, *mokone yangu*—by my own hand—to anyone, anywhere, be Barua a Soldani?"

★ ★ ★

TAKE THAT AND THAT

Sir, my secretary, being a lady, cannot type what I think of you. I, being a gentleman, cannot think it. You, being neither, will understand just what I mean.

when the wind blows

For the winds and the stars are unto her
As raiment, as songs of the harp player . . .

SWINBURNE, *Atalanta in Calydon*

And still of a winter's night, they say, when the wind is in the trees,
When the moon is a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas,
When the road is a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor,
A highwayman comes riding—
Riding—riding—
A highwayman comes riding, up to the old inn-door.

Over the cobbles he clatters and clangs in the dark inn-yard;
He taps with his whip on the shutters, but all is locked and barred;
He whistles a tune to the window, and who should be waiting there
But the landlord's black-eyed daughter,
Bess, the landlord's daughter,
Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.

ALFRED NOYES, *The Highwayman*

It's an Ill Wind . . .

I suppose she won't come until they are all asleep, he thought. It is a waste of time. The night is half gone. Oh, Maria. Come now quickly, Maria, for there is little time. He heard the soft sound of snow falling from a branch onto the snow on the ground. A little wind was rising. He felt it on his face. Suddenly he felt a panic that she might not come. The wind rising now reminded him how soon it would be morning. . .

Come now, Maria. Please come here now quickly, he thought. Oh, come here now. Do not wait. There is no importance any more to your waiting until they are asleep.

. . . Then she came running, carrying something in her hands,

and he saw her running long-legged through the snow. Then she was kneeling by the robe, her head pushed hard against him, slapping the snow from her feet. . .

"You came barefoot through the snow."

"Yes," she said, "and wearing only my wedding shirt."

He held her close and tight in his arms and she rubbed her head against his chin.

"Avoid the feet," she said. "They are very cold, Roberto."

"Put them here and warm them."

"Nay," she said. "They will warm quickly. But say quickly now that you love me."

"I love thee . . ."

A warm wind came with daylight and he could hear the snow melting in the trees and the heavy sound of its falling.

ERNEST HEMINGWAY, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*

Zephyr

Walking with a virgin heart
The green hills of May,
Me, the Wind, she took as lover
By her side to play.

Let me toss her untied hair,
Let me shake her gown
Careless though the daisies redden,
Though the sun frown,

Scorning in her gay habit
Lesser love than this,
My cool spiritual embracing,
My secret kiss . . .

ROBERT GRAVES, *The Hills of May*

Wind-Flowers

There grew pied wind-flowers and violets.
Daisies, those pearled Arcturi of the earth,
The constellated flower that never sets;
Faint oxlips; tender bluebells, at whose birth
The sod scarce heaved; and that tall flower that wets
—Like a child, half in tenderness and mirth—
Its mother's face with Heaven's collected tears
When the low wind, its playmate's voice, it hears.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

Harmonious Gale

The wind, indeed, seemed made for the scene, as the scene seemed made for the hour. Part of its tone was quite special; what was heard there could be heard nowhere else. Gusts in innumerable series followed each other from the north-west, and when each one of them raced past, the sound of its progress resolved into three. Treble, tenor, and bass notes were to be found therein. The general ricochet of the whole over pits and prominences had the gravest pitch of the chime . . .

THOMAS HARDY, *The Return of the Native*

Tranquil Breeze

Awake, O heart, an early breeze
Is softly sighing in the trees;
A swift-winged nightingale has brought
Me myrrh and spices from the South,
And rumours of the wonders seen
Within the courts of Sheba's queen,
Where amorous breezes gently stir
Above the languid head of her
Whose image still tormenteth me
Across the golden foaming sea.

Translated from the Persian of Hafiz by J. C. E. Bowen

Windward Side

If you are on the side from whence the wind is blowing, you will see the trees look much lighter than you would see them from the other sides, and this is due to the fact that the wind turns up the reverse side of the leaves, which is in all cases much paler than their right side; and especially they will be very light if the wind blows from the quarter where the sun happens to be, and if you have your back turned to it.

LEONARDO DA VINCI, *Notebooks*

DOUBLE OR QUIT

" Name your salary," he said

BY HUGH B. CAVE

STILL bright and brisk after his long flight from Kingston to the small South American republic of San Nicolas, Henry Clarke marched from plane to airport, looked around at the milling mob of tourists, and said to his fellow teacher and holiday companion, Douglas Naismith, " Oh-oh. This could be an all-day session."

"At least," Douglas agreed wearily.

" Ladies and gentlemen," intoned a khaki-clad man at the Immigration counter, " please be seated until your names are called."

Henry perched his five-feet-five on a wooden bench and said, " Oh well."

Back home his pupils never had any trouble hearing him when he spoke, and neither did the Immigration man here. Immigration thought he had said, " Oh, hell," however, and peered at him with displeasure.

Another man peered at Henry—a tall, thin man with alert and anxious eyes. He wore no uniform but he, too, was a San Nicolas official, here at the airport to meet arriving friends.

At the sight of Henry Clarke he leaned forward on his polished toes and opened his eyes wide in alarm. Next he went swiftly to the Immigration man and said in a low voice, " Let me see the passenger list! "

The list did not contain the name he sought, and he knew then that his position was delicate. His face showed it.

" Is something wrong, Señor Sebastian? " the Immigration man asked.

" Keep them seated! " the thin man hissed, and followed his out-thrust hand rapidly across the room.

" Señor! " he exclaimed, halting before Henry. " What a delightful surprise! "

Henry looked at him blankly. " I'm a stranger here," he said. " The name is Clarke—Henry Clarke."

Sebastian continued to smile. " But of course, Señor Clarke. Allow me to introduce myself, then. I am Emilio Sebastian.

brother of the President and Minister of Exterior Relations.'

Henry stood up, puzzled, to shake hands and introduce his companion. "Do you always greet visiting schoolmasters this way, Mr. Sebastian?"

Sebastian chuckled, despite his unease. "Schoolmasters? But of course. Always, señor." He chuckled again, this time in admiration. What a man!

"Come," he urged. "I have my personal car."

And, briskly wheeling, he marched past the Immigration counter, the Army counter, and the Health Officer's desk as though leading a parade, while the other passengers, who would have to stand damply before all those officials and answer questions, gazed at Henry Clarke and Douglas Naismith in envious astonishment.

Equally astonished, Henry followed his guide without protest until they reached the door. Then he said, scowling, "Wait a minute. Our luggage."

The Minister of Exterior Relations turned in mid stride and snapped at a Customs officer, "Send the luggage of Señor Clarke and Señor Naismith to the Casa Grande at once!"

"But we have reservations at the Papagayo," Henry informed him.

Sebastian's eyes popped. "The Papagayo, señor?" It was a modest little hotel in the heart of the city. "But that is impossible. We could not permit it." To the Customs man he snapped again, "The Casa Grande!"

Douglas Naismith said to Henry in a shocked whisper, "Henry, do you know what that place costs?"

And Henry with schoolmaster sternness said to their guide, "Señor Sebastian, I don't feel we can afford the Casa Grande."

Sebastian sighed. What a business! This was a man who called American cabinet officials by their first names; who gave parties in Washington that cost thousands—only five, six weeks ago Sebastian himself had attended one. This man directed the destinies of so many banks and corporations that merely to list them required a book almost as large as the San Nicolas telephone directory. But he did not feel he could afford the Casa Grande! Ah well, he was like that. Everyone knew he was eccentric.

"Señor," Sebastian murmured, "you are guests of my government. It could not be otherwise."

Henry Clarke glanced at his astonished travelling companion and shrugged.

Henry was perspiring when the limousine turned into the hotel drive, but not from nervousness; he was a brisk and energetic man

but never a nervous one. If the government of San Nicolas wished to accommodate visiting schoolteachers at the country's plushiest hotel, so be it. He wanted a shower.

First he had to be introduced to the hotel manager, who fussed and fluttered and hoped the distinguished visitors would not find his humble accommodations too primitive. The humble accommodations were almost as large as Henry's bungalow, and the whole suite as elegant as a motion-picture set.

"I haven't the slightest complaint," Henry informed him gravely.

Sebastian said, "I go to inform my brother, the President, of your arrival. And—ah—your plans, señor?"

"Plans? Oh yes, plans. Well, we'd like to see what we can of your country, naturally."

"Naturally." The Minister frowned at his watch. "I should return for you after lunch, perhaps? At, say, two o'clock?"

"That would be fine."

When they were alone, Douglas Naismith sank limply on a bed and gazed wide-eyed at his imperturbable companion. Douglas was large, plump, and scarcely a man of daring. He taught music, and his voice now resembled a yodel's echo. "Henry," he said, "what's happening to us?"

"I haven't the foggiest."

"But that man thinks he knows you!"

"If he's made a bloomer, it isn't my fault," said Henry. "I'm using my right name."

He smiled happily at his surroundings. "Stop glooming at our good luck, will you? Let's have a shower and see what sort of lunch they serve in this den of thieves."

Lunch was confusing with the manager and a corps of waiters hovering over them, but memorable as well, and promptly at two the Minister of Exterior Relations was back. He brought with him another nervously smiling gentleman, outrageously fat, whom he introduced as Señor Tonino, the Minister of State.

"Please feel free to ask questions and express opinions," Sebastian murmured as the car purred out of the drive. "Be assured of our most respectful attention." He sat between the two visitors in the rear, Tonino beside the chauffeur.

"That's very nice of you," Henry said. And a moment later, "What's that handsome place on the hill there?"

"That is the home of our General Morelos. We are quite up to date here, as you see. Quite modern."

"I thought it must be the National Palace, at least. I'll bet it cost something."

"$100,000, señor," said Tonino proudly.

"Golly," Henry said. "How much do you pay your generals, anyway?"

There was an awkward silence until Emilio Sebastian supplied hesitantly, "They receive $4,000 a year."

"Hm."

They proudly pointed out a number of glittering new government buildings—symbols, the Minister of State called them, of his country's progressive attitude. "Very handsome," Henry agreed. "Also very expensive, obviously. Can we stop at one of your schools?"

"Schools?" Emilio echoed weakly. "Ah yes, schools. Here, now, on our right is a recently-built secondary school . . . Does the señor wish to, ah, visit?"

"Of course. I'm very interested in schools. So is Mr. Naismith." And Henry would not be hurried as he strolled from one classroom to another, but stopped in each to examine books and equipment and watch the teachers teach.

"Your opinion of our educational system, Señor Clarke?" Emilio asked uneasily as they returned to the car.

"I reserve it until we have visited other institutions of learning," said Henry. "How much, by the way, do you pay your teachers?"

"Those in the school that you have just seen receive—ah—$1,000 a year, señor."

"Hm. And generals live in luxury."

The second school was not pointed out by the Ministers but was spotted by Henry himself as the car sped past. With obvious reluctance Emilio ordered the chauffeur to back up, and led the way into an ancient wooden building filled with small children, mildewed books, termites, and hungry-seeming teachers. "This I imagine is more typical," Henry observed. "I mean, you have more of this kind than the other?"

It was perhaps true, they admitted sadly. Education was so expensive. "And we are such a small country, señor."

"Well, everything's relative," Henry pointed out. "If you're a little country you don't have so many kids to educate."

At quarter to five the Minister of Exterior Relations, who had been glancing unhappily at his watch, said with obvious relief, "Señor, my brother is expecting us." The palace guards snapped to attention as the visitors climbed the marble steps. President Ramon Sebastian must have been watching at a window. He met them at the door.

"Señor Clarke," he said, offering a firm hand, "my country and I are honoured."

"So are we," said Henry, shrewdly looking him over. The President of San Nicolas was a man of sixty or so with strong features and greying hair—a man who looked intelligent.

"You must be tired," the President said. "May I suggest a cooling drink in my apartment?"

"The very thing."

"We have been showing Señor Clarke our city," said Emilio when the party was seated and ice tinkling in the glasses.

"Excellént," said his brother. "And this evening, with your permission, señores, we will introduce you to some of our people. I have arranged a ball in your honour; here in the palace."

The music master glanced at Henry Clarke with raised eyebrows, but Henry said calmly, "That's good of you, Mr. President. Of course, we don't have the clothes for a smart affair, but—" he grinned—"who'll notice?"

The President grinned too. "I quite understand. You did not expect—that is, you could not have known that my brother would be at the airport. I shall see that you are not embarrassed, señores." He reached for Henry's glass. "Another small drink, perhaps?"

Henry shook his head and stood up. "Thanks, but I'm just a schoolmaster."

"Until this evening, then." The Head of the Republic offered his hand again. "I will send my own car for you."

At the Casa Grande, Douglas Naismith collapsed on a chair and said plaintively, "Henry Clarke, do you realise what you told those men today?"

"What did I tell them?"

"You criticised everything in sight! Good grief, Henry, we're their guests!"

"Nonsense. What's an opinion good for if you don't express it?"

"But you can't go through life saying just exactly what you think all the time. Won't you ever learn? You've already lost your job back home—"

"I haven't lost it. I'm still a teacher."

"A teacher, yes. But you were senior English master before you sounded off about the new school and made everybody mad. You just won't learn to keep your mouth shut, Henry."

There was a moment of stillness while Henry Clarke chewed at his lip. Then, "I can't help what I am, Douglas. Forget it, and stop feeling sorry for me. We're having a great time tonight, remember?"

"I'm scared to death," Naismith groaned . . .

At the National Palace, President Sebastian was in conference

with his brother Emilio, Señor Tonino, and other members of his cabinet. They spoke in hushed tones.

"Obviously," Emilio said, wagging his head, "we cannot mention the loan. It would be most improper, not to say unwise. He came here as Señor Clarke to look us over and form an opinion. Had I not recognised him at the airport, we would never have known of his visit."

"I agree," said the Minister of State. "The loan must not be mentioned. All we can do is exert every effort to create a favourable impression."

"And observe his reactions," said the President, frowning.

"His reactions, Ramon?"

"Certainly. The man has a reputation for saying precisely what he thinks. He is shrewd and intelligent. His thoughts are of tremendous value. Do you realise, gentlemen, what it would cost us to *buy* his opinions? We couldn't afford him for a day."

"Ramon is right."

"Exactamente!"

"But I suppose," said the President with a sigh, "that our V.I.P., with his mind full of business matters, will have a dull time at the ball tonight and spoil the evening thoroughly for all the rest of us."

Never before in the history of San Nicolas had the gentlemen of the élite worn informal attire to a ball at the palace. Some, unwilling to believe what they were told, arrived in their usual elegance and were refused admittance. But the ball itself was a joy.

Henry Clarke did not have a dull time. He danced with the prettiest women and had the time of his life. Douglas Naismith, forgetting his fears, dared to accept a second glass of champagne and became twenty-one again. The ladies of San Nicolas found the visitors most attractive and were reluctant to let them go. Especially was the President's lovely young niece, Maria, reluctant to let Henry go after Henry stole a kiss behind a potted palm.

The President himself summed it up. "I did my duty," he said to his brother Emilio, "and it turned out to be one of life's greatest pleasures." There should be more informal affairs at the palace, he decided. Everyone talked more freely and had a better time. He hoped his cabinet ministers had obeyed instructions and listened attentively to what the Great Man said.

Henry had a late breakfast next morning and then was taken by the Ministers of State and External Affairs on a tour of the countryside. With, of course, Douglas Naismith. They looked

at sugar and coffee plantations, and at Henry's insistence also called on a humble village jefe and spent two hours inspecting a native market place. On their return to the city they were bone weary, and so were the cabinet ministers. When Emilio suggested an evening visit to the Casino, Henry firmly shook his head.

"I just want to sit. Besides, we don't gamble."

The Ministers gravely nodded, but on their way to the palace to report, Tonino said with a shake of his head, " Did you hear that? He does not gamble. Every day of his life he gambles thousands—millions—on a turn of trade or a whim of politics, but here he behaves like a tourist on a budget. What a man! "

At the palace, the President listened to their report and handed them a typed compilation of earlier remarks made by their distinguished visitor. He had been studying it for hours, he said. "And since the gentlemen do not wish to be entertained this evening, we will have a cabinet meeting. See that General Morelos is invited to attend. By the way, what are Señor Clarke's plans for tomorrow? "

Emilio said, " We had thought of showing him the site of the proposed hydro-electric project."

" Excellent. But stress its value to the peasants, how the dam will protect them from floods and provide water for their crops. You see by this—" Ramon waved his sheet of comments—" how his mind works."

Henry Clarke and Douglas Naismith left for their inspection of the mountain dam site at ten o'clock. At ten-thirty a Mr. James Corke—at least, that was the name on his passport—stepped from a plane at the airport. Mr. Corke did nothing to attract attention to himself, and there was no Emilio Sebastian there to recognise him, so in company with other tourists he was passed along from counter to counter, eventually obtained his luggage, and was free to step into a taxi.

" The Papagayo," he said, and settled back to peer out of the cab window. It was his first visit to San Nicolas and he had wired for a reservation at the Papagayo because a Washington friend, a former Ambassador to San Nicolas, had told him it was an old but clean little hotel where he probably would not be looked at too closely.

It turned out to be a one-time private residence on the plaza, close by the National Palace, with ancient wrought-iron railings in front and a walled garden at the rear, so completely charming that Mr. Corke said aloud—thinking of the former Ambassador—" Tony, my boy, you're a trump! "

He tipped the cab driver neither too much nor too little, and after waiting in vain for some sort of servant to appear, carried

his bag into the hotel. There being no one about, and nothing that resembled a hotel desk, he kept walking until he found himself in a kitchen. A round little man with his eyes shut and a far-off expression on his cherub's face was tasting a spoonful of something from a pot on the stove.

"Hullo," said Mr. Corke. "Are you Mr. Moncada?"

Bernardo Moncada, the hotel's proprietor, opened his eyes, frowned at the suitcase, glanced at a clock on the wall and said, "Oh-oh. The plane is in. You must be Señor Corke." With a happy smile he took the suitcase. "I am so sorry. I never remember to watch the time."

Then, abruptly, he frowned at his new guest.

"Something is wrong, friend?" Mr. Corke said.

"Wrong? No, no. It is just—no, nothing." The frown vanished. "Follow me, please."

Mr. Corke was led to an upstairs front room that had a high ceiling, french windows, and a little verandah. When he had changed into something cool, he stepped on to the verandah and studied the National Palace across the way.

"Hm," he said.

After lunch in the garden—and the food was excellent, as his Washington friend had assured him it would be—he said to little Señor Moncada, "Could you find a car and driver for me, do you think? A driver who speaks English?"

"Certainly, señor." This time Moncada frowned only a little.

To the driver who showed up ten minutes later Mr. Corke said, "You will drive slowly about the city, please. I want to see many things, and I may wish to talk to people. Do your job well and you can consider your fee doubled, provided it's a reasonable fee to start with."

Bernardo Moncada watched him go, then trotted into the Papagayo's little self-service bar, which was more a reading-room than a room for drinking, and flipped through a stack of newspapers on a table. Finding the one he wanted—it was yesterday's—he frowned for some time at a photograph in it and then, with a shrug, gave up.

"Lots of people look alike, I guess," he observed to no one in particular.

While the new arrival was touring the city with his hired driver, Henry Clarke was inspecting a mountain gorge fifty miles distant and saying with a shake of his head, "Yes, it would be quite a thing, Mr. Sebastian; anyone can see that. But how many people would it actually help?"

"There are six thousand people in the valley," said Emilio hopefully.

"Then I don't think you should do it," Henry said. "At least, not yet. Think how many more of your people need schools and medical care. I mean, if you had the money it would be fine, but you haven't."

"No doubt the señor is right," Emilio said with a sigh. "Still, it is a good plan for the future, no?"

"Of course. Without planning you'll get nowhere. But first things first."

Emilio sadly returned the pair to their hotel, asked if they would enjoy a performance of the National Folklore Troupe that evening—it had been specially arranged for them, he explained—and promised to return for them at eight.

"I feel," said Douglas Naismith when the two were alone, "as though I were sitting on a volcano. Henry! Do you realise what you're doing? You're insisting they reorganise the whole country!"

"So they ought!" Henry said, stretching on a bed and wiggling his bare toes.

"But you're not qualified to give such advice. You—you're only—"

"A demoted English master. I know." Henry grinned at the ceiling. "But we'll go down with our flags flying. You'll see."

At the palace, Emilio Sebastian said to his brother the President, "No dam."

"No dam?" echoed Ramon sadly.

"He does not approve."

The President exhaled heavily. "I was afraid he wouldn't. Oh well, it was worth trying."

Several times next day Mr. Clarke and Mr. Corke came perilously close to meeting. Henry spent the day driving about the city, with stops at the National Museum, the National Art Gallery, and some of the historic old churches. Mr. Corke was less interested in landmarks than in people. He talked to shopkeepers, clerks, government employees, dock workers, and even to the peasant-women gathering in the market place.

On one occasion their cars practically rubbed bumpers in a congested downtown street. Again they nearly collided at an intersection, but Emilio Sebastian, being the President's brother, ordered his chauffeur to turn the wrong way in a one-way street and the meeting was averted.

Both men had an interesting day and sore feet at the end of it. Both retired early.

In the morning, Henry Clarke said philosophically, "Well,

this ends it. Lunch with His Nibs and then farewell to the Caribbean. What time does the plane leave?"

"Two o'clock," Naismith said. "And I wish to heaven it were leaving this minute! Lunch with His Nibs, indeed!"

"He insisted. And it'll be fun."

The music master could only shiver.

The man who called himself Mr. James Corke ate a hearty breakfast that morning at a painted table in the Papagayo's garden, went sightseeing again, and returned at noon. While he was eating lunch, little Bernardo Moncada approached with the morning paper. "Big things are happening in our small country today," Bernardo said, pointing to the headlines.

"Oh?" said Mr. Corke.

"'Bold new improvement programme announced by the President!' That is something, no? And the story goes on to say that three of our most modern government buildings are to be converted into schools, while General Morelos, the head of our Army, has generously donated his new $100,000 home to the state for use as a hospital. And—"

"Let me see that!" Mr. Corke said, frowning.

"You read Spanish, señor?"

"I can read that kind of Spanish!"

Mr. Corke read the whole front page, then turned to an inside page to continue the story and found himself gazing open-mouthed at a photograph. The caption read: *For the past several days the Minister of Exterior Relations and the Minister of State have been seen everywhere with a visiting American schoolmaster, Mr. Henry Clarke. Why so much official attention to a school-teacher? Because Mr. Clarke is not a teacher, nor is his name Clarke. El Tiempo has learned from an unimpeachable source that he is actually Mr. Jonathan Gardner, the wellknown Washington industrialist.*

The American visitor and the two Ministers were pictured getting into a car in front of the Casa Grande.

Mr. Corke studied the photograph for thirty vibrating seconds and then lurched to his feet.

"Where's your telephone?" he shouted.

When Bernardo Moncada had led him into the library-bar where the phone was, he all but tore the pages out of the directory in his furious search for Emilio Sebastian's number.

Emilio was not at home, someone said. He was lunching at the palace. Mr. Corke dialled the palace with a finger so hot it smoked.

"I don't care how busy he is!" Mr. Corke shouted. "I don't

care if he's taking a bath! You tell him Jonathan Gardner is here in the city and wants to talk to him. The real Jonathan Gardner, from Washington, not that phoney who's running around impersonating me! You tell him I'm coming over there right now, and if he wants to talk about a loan he'd better have the door open!"

It isn't far from the Papagayo to the palace. Emilio Sebastian scarcely had time to absorb the whispered message and reach the top of the marble steps before Jonathan Gardner—the real Jonathan Gardner—came storming up them. At sight of his caller he felt dizzy. He had just left the same man in the President's private dining-room.

But no. On closer inspection there were differences. The attire, for example, and the touch of grey in *this* Mr. Gardner's hair. Obviously there were two men.

But which was which?

"Señor," Emilio faltered as the newcomer halted before him. "I do not know what to say. I do not understand." He wrung his hands.

Jonathan Gardner glared at him. "Six weeks ago," Jonathan snapped, "you attended one of my Washington parties. Next day you lunched with me and we talked for two hours about a loan for your country. You wore a dark blue suit, a blue tie with your initials embroidered on it in white. You had a nasty cough. You ate roast duck and told us how your mother used to cook duck in San Nicolas."

"Madre de Dios!" Emilio said faintly. "Señor Gardner, there has been a fantastic mistake!"

"I'll say there has," Jonathan Gardner retorted with spirit. "Where is this phoney who's impersonating me?"

"He—he is having lunch with my brother," Emilio groaned.

"Take me to him!"

When the dining-room door flew open, Henry Clarke was chummily telling the President of San Nicolas what an interesting time he had had in the President's excellent country. He stopped in mid sentence and turned to stone. So did Douglas Naismith, the President, and Señor Tonino.

Henry came unshocked first. "Well, for heaven's sake," he said mildly. "I've a double."

Followed by poor Emilio, Mr. Jonathan Gardner came forward with hands on hips and jaw belligerently jutting. "A double," he snapped, "you're a fraud!"

"I beg your pardon. I'm what?"

"A fraud! An impostor! What do you mean, pretending to be me?"

Henry stood up. "Pretending to be you? What in the world are you talking about? I'm not pretending anything."

"They think you're me. If you didn't want them to think it, then why—"

"'Hold on now," said Henry with righteous indignation. "My name is Henry Clarke and I've never said it was anything else. I'm senior master at—"

"Used to be," interrupted Douglas Naismith sadly. "You aren't any more, Henry."

"Well, I would be if there were an ounce of brains on the board of governors. At any rate, Mr. Whoever-you-are, I'm a schoolmaster and proud of it. Now who are you?"

Jonathan Gardner took his hands off his hips and said, "Do you honestly expect—?" But he was puzzled now, and as his anger abated he took time to peer into Henry's face, where he saw his own bewilderment reflected as though in a mirror. It was certainly not a wicked face.

"I'm darned," Jonathan said. "You mean you really don't know—" He bristled again. "Of course you know! You've been at this shady game for days. This morning's paper—"

"Don't you accuse Henry of being shady!" said Douglas Naismith with spirit. "All he's been doing is telling these people what's wrong with their country and how they can improve it. Furthermore, they asked him to."

"Why don't we all sit down?" Henry suggested.

They sat, and for a moment there was silence.

The President and his Ministers were too stunned to speak; Douglas was too angry; the two men who looked alike were overcome by natural curiosity. Jonathan Gardner broke the spell.

"Let me get this straight," he said. "You came here as a schoolmaster and were mistaken for me?"

"Actually," Henry said, "I didn't know what was going on, I mean, I didn't know I resembled anyone important." He was a bit flustered again. "I mean, you obviously are important—"

"Never mind about me," said Jonathan Gardner. "Are you responsible for what I've just read in the paper? About government buildings being made over into schools, and the general's home into a hospital?"

"Well, I suppose I am. I haven't seen the paper."

Jonathan came striding round the table and halted by Henry's chair. "Henry Clarke," he said, "how much do you make as a teacher?"

"Make? Well, I ought to be making—"

"Can you get a year's leave of absence? Two? Three?"

"Can I— What on earth do you mean?"

"These people want a loan. I was going to turn them down, but if you'll stay here as my representative to see they spend it right, I'll let 'em have it. They need it, all right. Name your own salary."

"Good heavens," said Henry.

"Ten thousand," said Jonathan. "Oh, why quibble? Make it fifteen. What do you say, Henry?"

"I say yes," said Henry without hesitation.

"You're out of your mind," wailed Douglas Naismith. "You're insane!"

"I know it," said Henry. "I love it. This will show that bunch of dead-beats on the school board."

Jonathan Gardner remembered then that he had not greeted the President. He did so briefly—the President was only just recovering from shock—and sat himself down at Henry's side.

"Well," Jonathan Gardner said cheerfully, "now that that's settled, what's to eat? Whatever you're having, Henry, I'll have the same."

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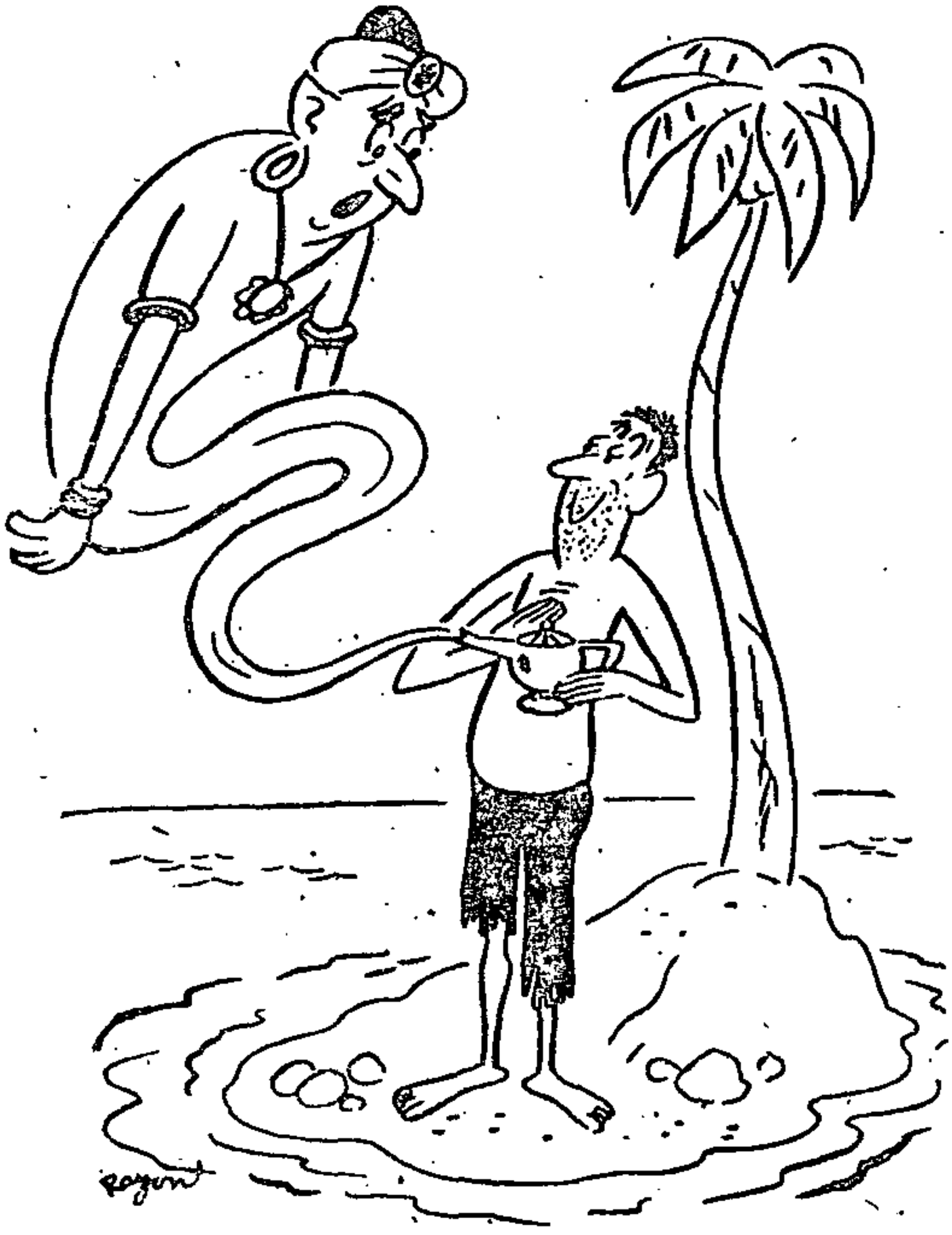

"And just where in hell am I supposed to get a girl?"

A MESS OF PORRIDGE

Catherine usually sat by me, but today she stole nearer to Hareton, and I presently saw she would have no more discretion in her friendship than she had in her hostility.

"Now, mind you don't talk with and notice your cousin too much," were my whispered instructions as we entered the room. "It will certainly annoy Mr. Heathcliff, and he'll be mad at you both."

"I'm not going to," she answered.

The minute after, she had sidled to him, and was sticking primroses in his plate of porridge.

EMILY BRONTË, *Wuthering Heights*

Grey Matter

There was a young lady of Norwich
Who dressed herself up in cold porridge
She said, with some doubt,
"It's better than nowt;
I'd go bare, but I haven't the courage."

CHRISTOPHER BIDMEAD

Heave Ho

A snood full of coarse porridge hung over the fire, and standing with one arm resting upon the high mantel, looking moodily down into the heaving contents of the snood, was a tall young man whose riding-boots were splashed with mud to the thigh, and whose coarse linen shirt was open to the waist. The fire-light lit up his diaphragm muscles as they heaved slowly in rough rhythm with the porridge.

He looked up as Judith entered, and gave a short, defiant laugh, but said nothing. Judith slowly crossed over until she stood by his side. She was as tall as he. They stood in silence, she staring at him, and he down into the secret crevasses of the porridge.

" Well, mother mine," he said at last, " here I am, you see. I said I would be in time for breakfast, and I have kept my word."

. . . Judith's breath came in long shudders. She thrust her arms deeper into her shawl. The porridge gave an ominous, leering heave: it might almost have been endowed with life, so uncannily did its movements keep pace with the human passions that throbbed above it . . .

" Do you want to break my heart? "

" Yes," said Seth, with an elemental simplicity.

The porridge boiled over.

STELLA GIBBONS, *Cold Comfort Farm*

Corn Plaster

In Wuthering Heights
the diet was cruel
nothing but toast
and water gruel

Faulkner's tragic
muse Melpomene
fed his characters
mainly on hominy

In Scottish novels
they lived on groats
which seem to consist
of dehusked oats.

All which statistics
seem to show
it's porridge makes
a tragedy go.

ROSIE LEE

With Love and Squalor

We were married the next week at nine in the morning in the Ipswich Registrar's office . . . To neither of us was the ceremony in itself of any importance: we had been happy lovers now for some time: all that we wanted was to get away from the restrictions of not being married, the pretence and separation it entailed . . .

" The promised squalor starts immediately," said Gordon as we came out of the office. " Will you slip across to a grocer's and get half a pound of coarse oatmeal while I strap the luggage on the car? I had a minor smash, skidding on my way here this morning, and there's a leak in the radiator. We'll fill it with a layer of porridge. I've done that before in emergencies: it works quite well. The best use for porridge. At least it'll get us away."

E. ARNOT ROBERTSON, *Ordinary Families*

The halesome parritch, chief of Scotia's food . . .
ROBERT BURNS, *The Cotter's Saturday Night*

Not Summoned by Bells

Breakfast was brought, and it proved a disappointment: the butter not eatable, the barley-cakes fusty, the oatbread so hard I could not chew it, and there were only four eggs in the house, which they had boiled as hard as stones.

There being no bell in the parlour, I had occasion to go several times and ask for what we wanted in the kitchen, and I would willingly have given twenty pounds to have been able to have taken a lively picture of it.

About seven or eight travellers, probably drovers, with as many dogs, were sitting in a complete circle round a large peat-fire in the middle of the floor, each with a mess of porridge, in a wooden vessel, upon his knee; a pot, suspended from one of the black beams, was boiling on the fire; two or three women pursuing their household business on the outside of the circle, children playing on the floor . . . even the smoky air, being a sort of natural indoor atmosphere of Scotland, served only to give a softening, I may say harmony, to the whole.

DOROTHY WORDSWORTH,
Recollections of a Tour made in Scotland

Central Heating !

Come lads, an' sit down to yo'r porritch;
I hope it'll help yo' to thrive;
For nob'dy con live as they should do
Beawt some'at to keep 'em alive:
We're snug; with a daicent thatch o'er us,
While round us the winter winds blow;
Be thankful for what there's afore us;
There's some that han nothing at o'.
So come, an' sit down to yo'r porritch;
I hope it'll help yo' to thrive.

EDWIN WAUGH,
Come to your Porritch

SHOOTING A LINE

" No fish, Eddie," I said,
" but a good story "

BY LESLIE GORDON BARNARD

IT WAS hot in the city and I wished myself back at the sea. When I got to the club it was a bit cooler, but not much. The stewards had drawn the venetian blinds to shut out the glare, and there was the usual tinkle of ice and voices. The same crowd as usual: Joe Macaulay and Harry Trimmble, Elson Smith and Buddy Wilson—all that lot.

And, of course, Eddie. I knew Eddie would tell me just how and why I missed getting a tuna.

" Look who's here! " Eddie greeted me. " Any luck? "

" No," I said.

Eddie grinned and nodded. Eddie would now tell me where I went wrong, and I didn't want to argue—it was too hot—so I said, " No fish, Eddie, but a good story."

" Let's have it," Eddie said.

" It's not your kind," I warned him. " There isn't a woman in it."

Eddie grinned. He began shouting for the steward to bring him another drink, and went grumbling out to see about it.

Harry said, " Don't wait for him. He'll probably shake up the whole management." Eddie was like that.

" The point is," I said, " did this old fellow Mac do right—or didn't he? That's how he put it up to me.

" Mac's the chap who took me out tuna fishing," I told them. " We had a pretty fair squall and it reminded him of a sporting type he took out once. Up to that time Mac had never taken a tuna. Mackerel, cod, herring—that was his line, but this fellow persuaded him because all the regular tuna boats were chartered. Money didn't matter, he said, so Mac rigged things up, got a lad to help with the boat, and they went out. You get quick changes off Little Harbour and this one came out of the sou'-west.

" Old Mac took a look and didn't like it, but his sportsman wouldn't hear of it. He'd just got his first tuna on, and to hell with the weather. It was Mac's first tuna, too, so they played the

fish while the sky got blacker and there was a growl of wind—not much yet. Even when they got the big fish alongside, and finally on board, it held off; but by then the sky was dark as the wrath of God. The land was just a distant smudge and then not even that. But they had the fish.

" It was a good fish, not the biggest they'd taken off the harbour, but plenty big. Four hundred and twenty-seven pounds. The fellow was pretty chesty about it, until the storm struck. Mac said he'd seen men scared and, times, he had been pretty scared himself—but this was different. The fellow grabbed him, shouting, ' We'll never make it.'

" And Mac said, ' We're in God's hands, mister.'

" But he hung on to Mac saying he didn't want to die, and that there were things a man did in his life . . . so Mac said if he had anything to get off his chest it was all right with him. The boy was busy bailing and it would be just between the two of them—and God, if you wanted to count Him in.

" So he told old Mac. It wasn't a pretty story. There was a woman mixed up in it and defalcations—the fellow was a bank clerk when it happened—but he'd got away with it and nobody had been any the wiser.

" Mac said, when you counted in all the details the fellow babbled to him, he felt as if he had a Jonah aboard and that if he could put him overboard the lad and he might make land. But make it they did at last—and with him on board, the surf creaming on the reefs, and the breakwater taking the big ones clean over as they ran for anchorage.

" Mac said you never saw a man change so quick in your life as that fellow did, once he knew he wasn't going to drown fathoms deep. He was the big city fellow then, with money to buy things, and no worry but to make sure an old fisherman kept his mouth closed.

" ' Offering me money, he was,' Mac snorted. ' I said I'd given my promise and that was good enough. To keep his damned money. And to this day, sir,' Mac said, ' I've never said a word about it to a soul, but it's all of ten years old now, and mentioning no names and no harm done to him, but this squall reminded me, sir, and I get to wondering if I done right to keep such a promise, and him sitting pretty and feeling he's got away with it all these years. And mind you,' Mac said, ' he's got the impertinence to come here now and again and goes out after tuna, but never with me, and I've heard him talking big up at the hotel in the harbour.' "

I finished old Mac's story, and I said, " Well, did he do right to keep a thing like that to himself, or not? "

Elson Smith said, "What else could he do? A promise is a promise—even to a guy like that."

Joe Macaulay got up. He slanted one of the venetian blinds to shut out more of the glare from the street.

Harry Trimmble coughed.

Eddie came in with a steward in tow—and drinks. "I missed your story," he said, "but I got some service. A hell of a place this is getting to be. Just set them down there, steward." He looked at me. "So you didn't get a tuna, eh? Who was it you went out with?"

"Fellow they call Old Mac," I said.

Eddie nodded. "Now there's your trouble right there," he said. "That old fossil ought to stick to his mackerel and cod. He's not a tuna man. I ought to know. First tuna he ever had in his boat I caught. Nice fish it was, too. Scaled just four hundred and twenty-seven pounds."

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SOLUTIONS to THE WOOD OR THE TREES?

on page 35

1. *The Jabberwock, of course!*
2. *a. Holland; b. France; c. Germany, and they are lime trees.*
3. *British warships, in the days when they* were *wooden.*
4. *Because it foretold Macbeth's downfall.*
5. *"We're all in for a jolly good soak."*
6. *Ash.*
7. *Dryads.*
8. *Fir, and other conifers.*
9. *Palm.*
10. *From the cask.*
11. *In bowls, or in golf meaning a wooden club.*

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD

on page 144

Across. 1, *Missionary.* 6, *Isis.* 10, *Panel.* 11, *Turntable.* 12, *Ex-owners.* 13, *Parent.* 15, *Spin.* 16, *Acts.* 17, *Topic.* 20, *Exact.* 21, *Eric.* 22, *Reel.* 24, *Repeat.* 26, *Anteater.* 29, *Macedoine.* 30, *Rowan.* 31, *Nose.* 32, *Ditto, ditto.*

Down. 1, *Maple.* 2, *Santonica.* 3, *Island.* 4, *Not cricket.* 5, *Rare.* 7, *Sabre.* 8, *Sceptical.* 9, *Straits.* 14, *Assignment.* 15. *Steersman.* 18, *Pretty wit.* 19, *Strands.* 23, *Feared.* 25, *Picks.* 27, *Rondo.* 28, *Hi-fi.*

Dramatic New Chapters . . .

The black fingers of the mountain range splayed out into the arid waste of the Great Desert—the Thirstland, and somewhere among them lay the canyon that sheltered the six survivors of the plane crash. Suddenly the desert had become a powerful enemy in their struggle for survival. Sturdevant, owner and charter pilot of the plane, in a desperate bid to seek help had set out alone into the Kalahari. Grimmelmann, the old German wise in desert lore, had searched for food and water, helped by Jefferson Smith, the young Negro professor from Harvard, and by Grace Monckton.

Grace, the only woman in the party—in her twenties, and recently divorced—had taken care of Mike Bain, weak with fever and cut off from his alcohol, tobacco, and all the things which made life tolerable for him. Grace had discovered a strange affinity with O'Brien, the tough, resourceful American hunter . . .

In all their minds, there was one desperate determination . . . to survive.

● ● ●

THEY carried armloads of wood to the top of the cliff up a zigzag trail that O'Brien had discovered and improved until it was relatively safe. It was close to the cave, close to the tiny fire that Grace kept going throughout the day.

The wood was piled carefully so that once ignited it would flare quickly. There were four special piles of tinder at the bottom of the big pile. If any of them saw or heard a plane at any hour they were to seize one of the torches, light it, and race to the cliff top. And perhaps the burning pyre would be seen and reported and they would be saved.

For a few nights Grimmelmann had made a fire each evening and in the morning it would be cold and they would have to start another. They had only a few dozen matches left, most of them in the old man's tobacco tin. A large permanent fire was impossible owing to the scarcity of firewood, but in the end they decided to maintain a small fire—a bed of glowing embers in a cleft a dozen feet from the cave entrance. It was left to Grace to keep the fire alive by feeding it scraps of tinder and wood. In the evening she

THE SANDS OF KALAHARI

by
WILLIAM MULVIHILL

scooped it up in O'Brien's mess kit and brought it into the cave and kept it alive throughout the night. And in the morning the glowing embers were again brought outside.

The daily routine of carrying the fire back and forth became almost ceremonial; somehow the old man took it upon himself to do the job although the mess kit was O'Brien's and the responsibility of keeping the fire alive was the girl's.

" It's easy to see why primitive man worshipped fire," Jefferson Smith said that night as they sat round it.

"And why he feared the night," Grace added.

"And the sun," Bain said. " Don't forget the sun. If it had been me, I'd have made the sun a devil." He lay in the sleeping-bag close to the fire.

" It was," Smith said. " A god and a devil all rolled into one. Something that could be good or bad depending on the quality of human sacrifices." He threw a twig into the fire and they watched it curl up and snap.

" You're so vulnerable here," Grace said. " The sun burns you,

the hot sand too; the night makes you shiver. Stones hurt your feet. When shadows come you imagine things, you see the goblins and spooks that you laughed at in your easy chair."

"And you wonder about the next day and the next week," O'Brien said. "I mean, you're conscious of living and dying. You see a scorpion or you bruise a finger and you know you might not be around too long if luck runs against you."

They were cut off from the world outside, not so much by sand and distance as by aloneness, fear, wanting. . .

Jefferson Smith stared into the fire. O'Brien, he thought, needed excitement, risk, challenge. Mike Bain had almost lost the will to live. And what of Grimmelmann? What of Sturdevant? And himself? Yes, what of himself?

He tossed a chip of wood into the fire. His back was cold, his face and arms warm. He had really come to Africa to find himself. He was not a scholar as much as a self-seeker; the Negro past was his past, his searching had become personal.

Africa was his home, perhaps the home of all men. He had been drawn to it out of some desperate need to see it, to look upon the face of his people, to smell, feel, touch the great land of his origin.

"I'd like to dig down in this sand," he said. "I bet we'd find fossils, old bones, skulls, tools, maybe." He held a fistful of the fine sand and let it run through his long brown fingers.

O'Brien grunted. "If you feel like digging, dig up some lizards for us."

"The earliest men lived around here," Smith said. "All over this part of Africa. They've found bones and skulls of men and of those who came before men."

Grimmelmann nodded. He had seen fossil bones.

"Missing links?" O'Brien asked. He lay prone in the sand, head towards the fire, eyes closed.

"No," Smith said, "real links. Man-apes or ape-men; something between animal and true man."

"Like the Java man maybe," O'Brien said.

"No," Smith said. "The Java man and the Neanderthal and the rest were men. Real men. These African skulls they've found represent something in between: only part human."

"Brains like ours?" Bain asked from his bed.

"No," Smith said. "Bodies like ours."

"I thought intelligence came first," Grace said.

"It couldn't come until we had hands," Smith told her. "Until we stood upright and used tools. The brain developed afterwards."

"I always thought it was the other way round," O'Brien said.

Bain worked himself closer to the fire. "One thing that I've wondered about," he said to Smith, "is this: why didn't some of these in-between characters survive? What happened?"

Smith smiled. "Remember, I'm no expert. But I'd say that they were killed off, exterminated by the earliest men."

"Why?" Grimmelmann asked.

"Because they were close enough biologically to inhabit the same

area, compete for space and food. They fought and man was the victor."

They were silent for a few moments thinking about it.

"That's one explanation," Smith said. "It might account for the great gulf between man and even his closest living relatives, the apes, say, the other anthropoids. All we have left of our past is a few bones and skull fragments, and some of the really important ones were found not too far from here."

"These early men," Grace said. "And later ones. How are we different from them?"

"We're cleverer of course than the real antique boys," Smith said. "But no more so than people in the last Ice Age. The important difference, unlike the one with the animals, is not physical as much as it is cultural. We have laws, codes, ethics. We are concerned with one another."

"Some of the time," Bain said. He thought of Sturdevant.

"Some of the time," Smith repeated in agreement, smiling.

"Hell," O'Brien said, sitting up. "I'm going to bed."

He stood up and yawned, moved into the darkness.

O'Brien trapped a lizard and killed it with a long stick, a hard dry limb from one of the thorn trees that grew in the sandy part of the canyon. He picked up the dead reptile by its long tail and studied it. There seemed to be different species and the one he'd killed was the most common. The head and body were together only two or three inches long but the tail was closer to six inches. The back and upper parts were light brown, mottled with a deeper hue, and four narrow lines of reddish-orange ran down its back. Its sides were creamy yellow. It was the kind Grimmelmann had roasted on a spit and eaten.

It was snakelike. O'Brien flung it away from him, and it fell and lay belly-up in the sand. He couldn't eat one now; he wouldn't eat one. The melons and the water were enough, and with any luck he might shoot something soon. There were big animals somewhere, animals that came to the pool and drank, gemsbok and zebra probably. It was just a matter of time.

A knot of hunger gripped him. He walked to the pool and drank as much as he could, lying face down, drinking the water from his cupped hand. He felt faint; his head ached. The dull hunger pain was still with him and he cursed silently.

He stood up and checked his rifle, began walking towards the opposite ridge. They had to have meat or die.

Hours later, in the middle of the afternoon, he climbed out of the canyon and walked along on the ridge. He could look down on the canyon now and across it to the cliffs they had descended a few days ago. He thought of the view from the peak and saw himself standing on the middle finger of the great black hand that stretched across the sand. The ridge was two hundred yards wide here, a difficult maze of upended slabs and loose shale that was dangerous near the edge.

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APPEAR
IN
ARGOSY

He made his way across the ridge and studied the third canyon. None of them had been down into it; and they had not yet explored the base of the central mass or the desert side of the most distant ridge.

Something moved below. He reached slowly for his binoculars and focused on it. A baboon was scowling at him; jabbering excitedly. He swung the glasses round and saw more of the dog-headed, apelike animals.

He had frightened them; they looked towards him and although the distance was too far for human eyes O'Brien knew that they saw him easily. He waved his hand and they scowled, became restive, jabbered to each other.

He found a place to sit and studied them for a long time. They did not forget him. They watched him too but they gradually relaxed and went on with their foraging. They dug in the ground under the dead grass and turned over loose stones. One of them pulled from the ground something that resembled a carrot. What did baboons eat? He would have to ask Grimmelmann. Was the carrotlike thing fit for humans?

He counted them but they were in constant motion and he knew that his figure of twenty-five was not correct but only close.

He got up and walked along the ridge towards the peak, looking for a way down. Within a half hour he decided against it; it was too late in the day; he was too tired. He turned back, found the way down into the home canyon, and walked across the plain.

Grimmelmann was sitting in the shade in the cave entrance.

"Why are there baboons here?" O'Brien asked. He walked past the old man and put his rifle in the niche and came out again. He sat down and took off his boots and let the sun dry his sweaty feet.

"Why are we here?" the German asked.

"Because of an accident."

The old man nodded. "The same, perhaps, for the other things here. It is not an ideal spot for baboons. The food supply is limited. But it might have advantages too. I do not think there are leopards here and they are the worst enemy of the baboon. Perhaps it is a good place after all."

"What do they eat?" O'Brien asked.

"Anything and everything. And I should imagine the ones here eat what baboons in better areas would not touch."

"Do they eat melons? Those cucumbers you showed us?"

"Ja," Grimmelmann said. "All of those. They eat what we can eat and many things we can't. They are better adapted."

"The hell they are," O'Brien said. "We're smarter, tougher."

"In what way?"

"I've got a gun," O'Brien said. "They haven't."

"They don't need guns," Grimmelmann said.

"They do now," O'Brien smiled.

"I do not understand . . ."

"I'm going to kill them," O'Brien said. "Wipe them out."

The old man rubbed his chin and nodded to himself.

"Sturdevant told me that you can't eat them," O'Brien said.

"I suppose he must be right," Grimmelmann said. "I never thought of it. They are so human-like, but of course people eat monkeys. I do not know. I do not think I could eat one; not at this point anyway. I see it as something close to cannibalism."

"My idea is just to shoot them," O'Brien went on. "If they eat what we eat they are competitors. I figure there's only so much food. Why let the apes eat it when we can stop them?" He looked sharply at the other man. "I can see you don't like the idea."

"I don't," Grimmelmann told him.

"Why not?"

"I do not like to see slaughter. I have seen enough."

"But this is self-preservation," O'Brien said. "Do you want to die here because the baboons ate what you could have eaten?"

"No. I want to live. I want to survive and reach my brother's farm. But I do not want to kill these animals. It is murder."

"It's war," O'Brien said.

"I do not approve," Grimmelmann said.

O'Brien got up and went into the cave.

Grimmelmann watched the evening come, felt the cool air. There was something wrong with all of them, some hunger within them that was unappeased, some weakness or shame. They had somehow failed as people and the hand of fate had given them a chance to find themselves in the purity of time and space that was the desert, the black mountain.

There was a terrible thirst in O'Brien for something he had never found, a seeking that had driven him to Africa. There were reasons why all of them were on the plane. Bain was an alcoholic despite his good brain and good manners; a wandering, homeless drunk. Sturdevant was part of the whole dirty mess of South Africa, a transporter of black flesh for the new slavery of the mines. The young Mrs. Monckton was alone, unhappy, without love. They might find what they sought here, away from the distraction of civilisation; there was nothing trivial here, nothing to divert.

Evening came and they ate round the outside fire. Grace Monckton had made a soup. She filled Sturdevant's copper kettle with water and added, with Grimmelmann's approval, various things that they had found during the day of foraging. A smooth oily root that the old man tasted first, a half cup of grass seed, a withered narras cucumber. She boiled this and when it cooled it tasted better than warm water. They ate melons and took turns drinking the weak soup from the kettle.

O'Brien told them about the baboons, about his plan to exterminate them. The others listened and nodded.

"Whatever you decide won't change things," Grimmelmann said. "You will not bother them too much."

"How's that?" O'Brien asked. He saw the old man smile and it made him angry.

"You *can't* wipe them out," the German said. "They are too intelligent, too fast. When they learn that you can kill them at long distance they will stay out of range. You will only wear yourself out. The baboon is too smart to allow himself to be exterminated. Do you know that the Egyptians used them to perform menial tasks such as gathering wood? That they were only replaced when war prisoners became easier to secure? Their intelligence is almost human. One of the Egyptian gods was a baboon."

"You'd better forget it," Bain said. "Save your energy and the ammo for something better."

O'Brien smiled and let the subject drop.

LONG before dawn, while it was still cold and black, O'Brien got up silently, took his rifle and walked out of the cave.

The old German was a fool. The baboons had to be wiped out. They were competitors. He was a hunter and the others did not understand him; they did not know what hunting was, the waiting, the planning, the thinking. They did not know.

The rifle reassured him in the darkness, the wonderful feel of it, the balance, the potency. A beautiful rifle that he had cleaned carefully the day before, loaded now with clean bright ammunition waiting to seek out and kill at long range. He was going to shoot a baboon and eat it. Smith's open disgust at the idea did not make sense. If one ate lizards to survive, then one could eat baboon meat.

There was an excitement in O'Brien, something he did not fully

understand but which exhilarated him. The desert was a great challenge; it could *kill* him. Until now, everything had been easy for him all his life. Football, the Marines, everything except for the two terrible years of his marriage, and the bitter divorce proceedings. He had married the wrong girl: a girl who did not love him and was at once puritanical and rapacious. He could not trust women afterwards. He saw them as a breed apart, willing to destroy themselves for the symbols of luxury and status. Correcting the mistake had left him bitter and humiliated.

Now there was only the desert and he—O'Brien.

Light streaked the sky. Perhaps thousands of years ago men walked across the valley at dawn with throwing-sticks and flint-headed spears; the men who had made the flints they found; they were hunters, and then the land must have been different, fertile and filled with game as the Sahara had once been. Prehistoric men. But that would be the wrong term, for all the men who had ever lived and hunted in the valley were without history—the flint makers and the Bushmen and the Bantu if they had ever come. They were all wild hunters without a written language, savage men who spent all their time gathering food. As he did.

O'Brien stayed close to the cliff face until he reached the first break; then he began the difficult climb upwards.

He'd given his hat to Sturdevant but his hair was long and thick now, and he didn't need the hat. It was an artificial thing which would not help him hunt; his black beard and hair blended with the obsidian rock.

He was sure of himself, sure of his strength; he was twenty pounds lighter than he'd been when the plane crashed and despite the diet he knew he was stronger, quicker, his senses sharper.

The sun rose. He rested for a few minutes on a ledge. He took off his binoculars and swept the jagged rock world around him. A lone baboon sat on a rock high above, a sentinel. It would be a useless shot; he had to get closer and get the sun out of his eyes. He put the glasses away and began climbing.

He reached the top and stood for a long time looking out over the sand sea; Sturdevant was there somewhere, reaching out desperately to contact the outside world. If he failed they might be here for ever. He walked to the end of the cliff and looked down. It was a straight drop of hundreds of feet, perhaps a thousand. He backed away from it and found his glasses, looked for the sentinels. He found none.

He made his way down the ridge, away from the peak, eyes alert for anything: for bees that might lead him to honey, for fat lizards, for new plants to take back to Grimmelmann who knew the poisonous from the edible, the good from the bad. The steep cliff on his left ended; it was broken now, shattered. He studied it for a while, found a way down, and began the descent.

The smell of baboon came to him; he stopped and looked round but none of them were in sight; it was as if they sensed his purpose. He moved on and the way became easier and he sat down and

rested, his back against the warm stone. He took off his boots and switched his socks; they were full of holes.

He stood up and started down the slope and ahead of him something moved and cried out. A sentinel, perched on a needle of rock, called out in alarm. Somehow they had lost him and he'd surprised them. He swung the rifle up and found the big doglike primate in the telescopic sights; he held his breath; he fired.

The baboon leapt backwards into the air.

He moved forward carefully, for the way was suddenly dangerous again—a fifty-foot drop on his left. Then ahead of him, level with him, the troop appeared, shooting up the escarpment to the dizzy heights above. Never in their memory had they known such a noise; never had a sentinel died before. They fled in terror.

O'Brien came to the high rock and worked down round it. He found the dead baboon. It was bigger and heavier than it had appeared; its arms and neck and shoulders made his own look puny. It was an ape with a dog's head; its great jaw was filled with terrible teeth. He looked up and around him in sudden fear. Grimmelmann was right. A big baboon was dangerous; this one could have killed him; torn his limbs off . . . It was easy to understand now how two or three of them could kill a leopard.

It was too big to carry back to camp. He found his knife and began cutting into the warm body; the body was human-like and he wondered if he could eat it. It was meat and he was on the verge of starvation.

Then a sound in the rocks near him. He froze, knew what made the sound. He reached for his rifle and spun round.

A baboon was twenty feet from him, creeping, baring its big teeth in sudden surprise, reaching out with long hairy arms. He shot it through the head. A second bounded at him screaming and he pumped three bullets into it before it collapsed almost at his feet. Two others fled, bounding over the rock jumble like rubber balls.

He stood up. His legs shook and he wondered if he could make it up the cliff. It was like the war. Hunting was war. Three dead baboons.

He retreated to the shade of a tall slab of rock. There was no fuel here, nothing to burn. He'd cut the best meat from the three bodies and carry it back up the escarpment and down again to where there was wood. And then he would cook it and eat it; he was slowly starving to death and he would eat anything to stay strong, stay alive.

O'Brien got up and went into the sun again and began cutting pieces of meat from the stiffening carcasses. He was hungry.

STURDEVANT got to his feet, fixed the pack until it rested comfortably on his shoulders, and walked on into the desert. The sun was touching the flat horizon far away. Time to move.

He walked on, westward. The water sloshed in the tins and

he liked the sound of it. Since he had left the others four nights had passed, long quiet nights of the sky and the stars and the flat desert devoid of any living thing, like a great sea.

He walked each night and when the sun came again he sought refuge from it. He dug a trench in the sand the first day and covered it with the pack and the jacket and he had spent the day there, almost suffocating but out of the direct and brutal rays. Never had a day been so long and the cold night so welcome. The next day had been better; the land became a little more irregular and he came to a long rock whose base had been scoured and worn away by wind-blown sand so that it afforded some shade. He found an arrowhead in the sand and a broken jar with a pointed base. Bushman.

He walked on.

It was all one big gamble and it was best not to think about it. Walk, move, keep going. Cover the space, the distance. He had to keep going and reach some place or they would all die. Nobody would ever trace them. They were all on their own, six people.

Two hours later he stopped and rested, ate another melon and sipped some of the precious water. So far, so good.

When dawn came he found himself on the top of a long sloping rise; as the light improved he saw a blur of thornbushes below.

He walked towards them, rifle ready. Bush provided shade and cover; perhaps a bustard here, a fat zebra. Deserted anthills, some of them ten feet high, rose out of the bush, insect castles, almost indestructible.

He found no game. An hour passed and he grew tired and hot for the sun was rising. He found an anthill that would provide some shade, and put his pack and rifle down. He searched the base carefully for scorpions and snakes and then drank from one of the tins. He wedged himself close to the concave anthill and shut his eyes. It was better to be here than back in the canyon, better to escape, to get out, to try. He could not endure waiting, hoping for time to pass, sweating out a rescue.

The sun rose but he was safe from its direct rays. He felt the relief in his legs; he was tired, so tired . . .

At dark he stood up, his legs stiff from fatigue. He drank some water, fixed the cans on his back, and walked on across the great level land, white and unreal when the moon came.

In the deepest part of the night he began to laugh. At first the sound of it terrified him, for it made the dead world seem more spectral and the aloneness more acute. Then the noise seemed familiar and comforting. Walking became difficult, then impossible. He sat down still laughing, a part of his mind telling him that he was overtired, perhaps on the verge of complete exhaustion.

It was so funny . . .

Looking for water. Seeking and questing for water. It was the core of the trekboer life and now he was part of it after all the long years of struggle. His great-grandfather, his grandfather, all those before him whose whole life was a search for water, with the bellow

of thirsty cattle in their ears and hot dust blowing in their faces. Water, water, water.

The burden was his now, the wheel had turned full circle. But he was alone, all alone, and if he did not find water he would die. And yet it was funny. After a while he stopped laughing. His stomach hurt. He worked the water tins loose and drank a mouthful. Somebody had played a great joke on him. He fixed the cans on his back and got up and walked on.

He came to low dunes which rose into sombre hills, desolate and strange. Rock replaced the sand he had struggled through and his feet felt strangely light. When dawn came he was an hour from the highest point and he headed towards it, excited for the first time.

But there was nothing to be seen from it except the faint outline of a dry stream bed which wound snakelike to the south and west. He would follow it. It was dry and insignificant and probably vanished into some great sand bed miles or days away but he would stay with it because it was something. It might lead to the sea.

He worked down the slope and felt the sun on his face. There was a cleavage in the stone with a slight overhang and he decided to make it his sleeping place. He put the water cans in the shade and counted his matches. Seven left. He'd make a fire.

He walked off with the rifle and came back an hour later with a brown lizard that had studied him too long from the flat rock where it sought the sun after a night in the clammy rocks. He skinned it carefully, removed the entrails and buried it all immediately to keep the flies away. He gathered dead thornbush branches, picking many of them individually from the bushes, raking up the remains of others with his hands. It took a long time and he was sweating and thirsty when he was finished.

He roasted the lizard meat over a small hot fire, cooking small chunks of it a piece at a time. He had two melons left and he ate one of them along with the meat and allowed himself some water. It was a good meal and when it was over he buried the remains of his kill, crawled under the outward-jutting rock and fell asleep.

When the sun went down he would follow the river bed.

He went on, walking by night and sleeping where he could during the long day. He followed the dry stream bed and on the second day it grew wider and stonier. But there was no water. He dug in several places but found nothing. He hurried on as his water cans grew lighter.

He talked to himself at times during the night walks; he would tell himself not to quit, to keep going. There was salvation for him and the others he'd left back at the mountain; he'd make it, he'd make it . . :

And he would sing. The noise was welcome and it proved he was alive and there was always the chance that somebody might hear him. Sometimes his voice grew hoarse, his throat dry, and he would have to drink more water but he was willing to pay for the singing with a few extra sips of water, for the loneliness of the

desert night was oppressive. If he did not despair, if he kept control of himself, he might well make it to the coast.

The country began to change, to slope downwards. Then on the far horizon one dawn he saw a great blur of mountains. He walked on until the heat drove him to dig a burrow under a protruding slab of grey stone. He spent the rest of the day there, faint from hunger. Night came and he staggered on, talking to himself of the deep pools of water and the game he would find in the mountain ahead. And people. There would be people. A ranch run by an eccentric old German . . . natives herding sheep . . . a hunting party.

He went on through the night, falling many times from the dizziness of hunger. The last time he went down he stayed down, curled in the gravel, and when he woke it was light. He got up and walked carefully out of the river bed. He had to eat within a few hours or he would die. The rifle was too heavy to hold level. The country was rough, mottled with thornbush and scattered trees.

He came upon a strange phenomenon—a big dusty turtle lumbering across his path. He stopped and watched it, knowing that he would kill it and eat it and live for another day or two.

The eating of it did not worry him. He had eaten turtle before in civilised places with white tablecloths and silver; his hunger was such that he could eat anything. But the killing bothered him. He could not shoot it and waste another bullet and he could not smash its shell with a heavy stone as one could kill a lizard or a snake; he did not know why but he knew that killing it this way was beyond him.

He caught up with the turtle and it hissed and pulled in its head and feet. He rolled it over and sat down. He tapped the shell with a stick and the head shrank farther into the reptilian folds. Turtles were creatures that no one should kill. They were too old and slow and helpless and dignified; if he lived and made it to the coast and safety he would never again eat turtle soup.

He stood up and began to gather wood. He could eat the turtle raw but it might be better to cook it. He would make a great fire and someone might see it and come to investigate. There was a lot of wood here, more than he had seen.

The turtle was gone when he came back with his first armload of thorn branches. He threw the wood down and ran round until he found it lumbering off with uncanny speed. He caught up with it and picked it up. The shell was over a foot long and it was much heavier than he had supposed. The head and legs had been sucked inwards but as he walked back to the pile of wood the head came out and two orange eyes studied him. Like all turtles it became tamer as it was handled.

" I'm sorry," Sturdevant told it. " I am sorry I have to kill you and eat you, but it is your fault. You walked the wrong way this morning. It is your fault."

He put it upside down again but he knew he could not leave it for it was able to right itself and run off. It might somehow escape and if it did he would probably die in the night.

He selected a strong straight thorn branch and cleaned it with his knife, taking off the thorns and minor branches. He sharpened the thin end of it. A miniature spear.

He went to the turtle and bent over it. This is how one murders, he told himself. Now I have done all things . . . I have killed men in the war with no feeling but this is truly murder. Or am I mad now from the sun and the guilt and the yearning? I cannot shoot you, Turtle, I cannot waste a bullet on something as slow and helpless. I will not crush you . . .

He drove the sharpened stake into the wrinkled folds of the neck, felt it penetrate deep inside. He groaned and looked away, then ran from it as it writhed and flopped and bled to death. He ran across the sun-baked land and stopped at last and found that he was crying, shouting wildly. He slumped down and rested, telling himself that he was sick and half-mad from hunger, that he must eat and find some shade and sleep until the sun went away. He could make the mountains now.

After a time he got up and gathered an armload of sticks and went back to the turtle. It was dead and flies crawled on the bloody spear that protruded from its neck.

Far ahead in the tricky light of dawn Sturdevant saw trees. He saw them and he looked away, to the reddish sand, to his shoes. There could be no trees, bushes perhaps but no trees. It was a mirage to trick him. It was seven days now, or rather seven nights of walking, and in all that time there had been no trees, nothing green, only a few wait-a-bit thorn and queer desert plants that could live for years without water. Grimmelmann had been right. There was no way a man on foot could get to or from the black mountain. How far had he come now? A hundred miles?

But they were trees. He felt the excitement build up; trees indicated water, water somewhere underground. He found himself running and stopped. Conserve energy. Act intelligently. He still had some water left and it sloshed around in the tins with each step, sometimes throwing him off balance.

A vley, a depression filled with withered grass and scraggly trees fighting to stay alive. He sat down in the shade, slipped free of the water tins, rested, tried to sleep. There was no surface water; he'd have to dig for it but only when the sun went down. There were sixteen skinny trees, two of them obviously dead.

He sat up and drank some of the water while it was still cool from the night; he drank all he wanted. The ground was hard under him and he scraped away a place for his hip and closed his eyes. A hundred miles of sand and now a paradise of shrunken trees and dead grass.

In the evening he would get up and find a spot in the grass and dig. The crust would be hard but he would break through it with the hunting knife. The soil would be dry at first and then heavy with moisture and then water. There had to be water. He would fill the two cans and then drink all he could hold and walk on. And

the country ahead as far as he could see looked somehow higher, stonier; perhaps the blur ahead was more trees or hills. He would climb one of the trees later and look.

He fell asleep.

The dream came. He was underwater, swimming naked through great masses of tropical fish, and he caught one and surfaced. The fish was ready to eat and he bit great chunks from it and gulped down the boneless flesh. O'Brien was there too with several great grilled steaks sizzling over an open fire; they ate the steaks alone in their greasy hands and drank big mugs of cold beer with it.

And the dream went on and he writhed and groaned and talked. He dreamt of good meals he had had, of meals that he had heard about, that others had eaten.

Restaurant meals of turkey . . .

When the sun went down he got up and found the lowest spot in the vley and began to dig. He broke through the hard sun-baked soil with the hunting knife and lifted out the big chunks one at a time. Then the soil became soft and he stabbed it, loosened it, then scooped it out with his cupped hands.

He had to find water here and get through to civilisation and save the rest of them. It was his responsibility; they had put their lives in his hands, and he had crashed them into the middle of nowhere.

He rested. The hole was two feet deep. He began digging again, clawing into the soil and flinging handfuls of it away; darkness came and he continued, slow now, for his fingernails were broken and worn, his fingers raw. He dug and rested, enlarged the hole. And then he was in the hole itself still digging, clawing through the endless sand and finding nothing. He stopped and rested once more, put his head on the soft sand, made himself comfortable, fell asleep.

He awoke several hours later, cramped and still tired. He began to claw in the bottom of the hole, finding handfuls of sand and throwing it up and away. Then he remembered that he had some water in the cans and he found them and drank deeply. The sun was coming up. He ate one of the melons and went back to the hole.

It was four feet deep now but the sand piled round it made it look larger. He got in it carefully and began to dig. Fatigue set in again and his arms began to tremble. He cut his right forefinger on a sharp stone and rested for a time until the bleeding stopped.

When he started digging again the sand was moist and then the miracle: water. He began to laugh and cry at the same time. Water seeping up from the dry sand . . .

Two days later he came to a gnarled tamarisk stump, grey and ancient. He kicked it and it broke and fell heavily to the sand, split, and bared its rotten pulp. Ants ran crazily from the new raw top of the stump that was almost level with the sand. Sturdevant saw them and was sorry; he had destroyed their home by a senseless act. He walked on . . .

Sturdevant walked on. He did not hurry and his steps were

methodical. He was five days from the place where he had dug for water and the two tins were still heavy; he had found melons and had killed and eaten a rodent of some sort.

There was only the sky and the land. His enemy was distance and the feeling that he was the only man alive, walking the earth. The Great Thirstland.

Another night in the cave. Another fire against the rock wall. They huddled close to it, watching the progress of a flame on a grey stick, anticipating the crumbling of an ember, the slow disintegration of a favourite piece of wood.

"I think story-telling began this way," Jefferson Smith said, "in front of a fire. A fire is alive; things happen in it if you watch for them."

"The television of the Stone Age," O'Brien said.

"It soothes and relaxes," Grace added. "Your imagination takes over." O'Brien was close to her; she could smell him; she brushed against him. She'd never been alone with him yet.

"Yes," Grimmelmann said. "A fire is good. It brings people together, all of them seeking something basic such as food or warmth or companionship. There is too little companionship left in the world. We all live too much alone, afraid to draw close to others."

"I keep thinking about the Bushmen who lived here," Bain said. "I see the fire and I look over and see the rock paintings and I go back in time and see some little guy standing in the sand with his paint pots."

"They carried the paint in the hollow ends of little horns," Grimmelmann said. "I saw a set of them once, eight or ten woven together in a sort of apron, with wax plugs to keep the paint covered."

"I read somewhere that they don't paint any more," Smith said. "Another lost art gone to hell."

"Tell me," Bain said. "Where did they come from? Were they always here in Africa? What's the story of them?" He turned from Grimmelmann to Smith and back again.

Grimmelmann smiled and Smith let his hands fall into a gesture of hopeless ignorance. "Who can say?" Smith said.

"I keep hearing Hottentot and Bushmen," Bain said. "What's the difference?"

"A great difference," Grimmelmann explained. "The Hottentot are pastoral people; they raise crops, keep cattle. The Bushman is a primitive man, wild, a hunter. People confuse them because they are both small and because they live in overlapping areas. They are quite different in skin colour and speech and all other ways."

"How big are these characters?" O'Brien asked.

"Under five feet," Grimmelmann said. "They might average four feet ten. The women smaller. Once, long ago, I saw a woman who was four feet two inches. An adult.

"I think the man or men who painted those pictures on the wall

belonged to a hunting party," he went on. " The Bushmen raided other people on the edge of the Kalahari, all around them. Cattle raids. They would go off, a party of them, and the women would follow behind with water carried in ostrich eggs. The shells would be buried at various spots along the way for the men and cattle to drink on their trek into the waterless desert.

" The raiders would come upon a herd, slaughter the watchmen, and run off with the cattle. The alarm would be given and the pursuit would start. The Bushmen would poison the wells and pits if there were any and subsist with the cattle on the water the women had left for them. If the pursuers got too close the raiders would shoot the beasts with their poison arrows and melt into the landscape. Or they might wait and ambush the owners of the cattle."

"And the cattle would be butchered and eaten in any case," Bain said.

Grimmelmann nodded. They sat for a time, quiet. Grace threw a new piece of wood on the fire and the sparks swirled upward to die in the blackness above. They could feel the cold outside now; a cold that had suddenly replaced the heat of the day.

" Why did you come back here? " O'Brien asked.

Grimmelmann looked up from the fire.

" To escape," he said. " I came back to find my brother. He has a place here, a great farm. I had planned to stay with him and his family, his five sons." Grimmelmann smiled. " When the war ends I am an old man and I am tired. I can speak some English, however, and I get a good job working with the Americans. The years of occupation go by and suddenly I get a letter from my brother. It is three years old and has been passed from hand to hand by those who knew me in Bremerhaven. I decide to leave Germany for good. It takes two years to arrange even that. And now I am here with you."

Bain yawned. "Another day." He was feeling better.

Smith looked at him. " Is that good or bad? "

" Bad," O'Brien said.

" Good," Grace said. " We are a day closer to being saved. A plane will come soon."

Smith nodded to himself. It would be such a waste to die here. And he couldn't die: he was too young and had too much to do. And he was a rare bird too, a Negro professor in a great university, a scholar, a symbol. He was needed.

He held his hands out, palms facing the flames. Hope. It was the drug that kept them all going. Life was so uncertain that people invented all sorts of myths to bolster their fears. And he was guilty of it too, thinking of himself as more important than the others because he was a success symbol, a needed person.

Perhaps he was important but if he was it had nothing to do with being a Negro. Being a Negro had not mattered much in his life; he had never been seriously harmed by prejudice and hate. During his boyhood there had been embarrassments and experiences that had left him shaken but they had been uncommon.

He had finished Cornell and gone on to Harvard. The world was good. The fact of his race rarely entered his head; he didn't think of himself as a Negro and it bothered him, made him feel guilty at times. He felt that he owed something to his race, that he should become a spokesman, a fighter against all that was wrong, a political leader. But he remained in the academic world, staying on at Harvard. . .

When they left the fire and went to their beds, Grace Monckton lay for a long time watching the fire. She wanted to go to O'Brien; she was empty and alone and she wanted him.

She had waited for him to return in the late afternoon. He was always gone from the cave before she woke and the days seemed endless now without him, waiting for him. And then he came striding down the canyon, naked except for the old shorts that he wore. She watched the muscles ripple across his chest, his hard stomach. He was so different from her husband who was her ex-husband now, the good-natured Andrew Monckton.

O'Brien had come and stood before her, showed her the lizards he had found and killed, the meat that would be their supper. But there was a greater hunger in her. She moved close, brushed him with her bare shoulder, pretended to examine the dead lizards.

He leaned close to her and she no longer knew or cared what he was saying; she wanted him to reach out and hold her, kiss her, tell her that he loved her. . . Unlike most men he looked better with a beard than without one, looked better half naked than fully clothed. He reminded her of something out of antiquity: a victorious gladiator, a corsair, a wild Celt.

Then he was gone, moving away into the cave.

Now, in her bed, watching the fire, she knew that she wanted O'Brien more than anything else she had ever wanted or dreamt of wanting. She was a delicate creature in a relentless world of rock and sand. She could not be alone any more; she had to have a mate. O'Brien was alive and hard and vital; she wanted him physically as she had never wanted her husband. There was a ruthlessness in him that she both feared and hungered for, a violence that she knew in her dreams, that left her shaking and sweat-covered in the darkness.

She couldn't go on much longer without him.

There was an eagle's cave on the outside of the peak, facing the desert, the north. O'Brien discovered it one day searching for baboons. It was just visible from a spur on the short ridge, the one he sometimes thought of as the Thumb Ridge. He saw the big bird glide down from the cloudless sky and vanish into the great cliff face; he went farther out on the spur and studied the cliff, saw nothing. Then he noticed a whiteness on the black stone, bird droppings. He aimed the rifle at it and saw through the telescopic sight a break in the rock face above the whitness. It was a cave, and he could see movement inside. Later the eagle appeared, thrust itself into the air, and flew away over the desert.

O'Brien moved and found a spot where he could rest the rifle and observe the eyrie. It fascinated him; the idea of an inaccessible place, perhaps a deep cave, which no man had ever seen. How long had it been the home of eagles?

Some days later, on the other side of the peak, he discovered a way down to the desert floor. It was a dangerous descent but he took his time and moved down the hundreds of feet. None of them had ever been here; they had dismissed it as a source of food but he knew that it should be explored.

He rested at the bottom, in the shadows of great fallen slabs that had once been part of the massif. He killed a long yellow lizard and ate it uncooked. It was a reward he was entitled to, he told himself. He needed more food than the others. He was the hunter.

He remembered the eagle's cave. It was two or three miles from where he was; hundreds of feet up. He began to walk towards it, round the bulge of the cliff. The sand was extremely fine here, desiccated granite with a large proportion of mica. His feet sank into it and after a quarter of a mile he was forced to rest and drink some water. It was more desolate here than in the most remote parts of the canyons; the desert closed in, pressed against him; the sun gave no quarter; above the sheer rock threatened.

But he kept on. He had told himself that he was going to locate the cave and stand beneath it. He would go on if it consumed the rest of the day and all his strength. He walked on through the heavy sand and after a long time he located the white splash high on the cliff overhead, saw the great bird fly away and vanish in the distance.

The unspoken thought that he had toyed with, the idea that he might climb to the cave, would never again enter his mind. No human could climb the glasslike rock. The cave above was safe from all wingless creatures.

He came to the base of the cliff and started. There was life here, strange gruesome plants growing in the granite sand, fertilised by eagle droppings. From one rock a stalagmite of white dung rose. A thick-leafed plant grew near it, finding life somehow in the impossible environment. And everywhere there were bones and splinters of bones, the debris, the garbage from above. There were prints in the sand, of hyena and jackal perhaps, of land scavengers who came to investigate and steal from the scraps. The sand was covered with ants too, strange white ants, slow-moving. And there was a smell that penetrated the very rock, a smell that seemed ancient, poisonous. But yet, in the dung and among the decay of old feathers and ancient filth, there was life. The dung had altered the chemistry of the sterile soil and brought alien seed to it; things lived here now, alone but alive.

He turned and walked away.

The desert was quiet except for the hum of invisible insects. There was a beauty here, O'Brien thought, a wildness that stirred him: the sharp cliffs, the great black peak, the jumbled rock piles,

and the stunted grass that grew in the hard soil and heavy sand.

The desert was a world of extremes, a lost place of antique plants and people, of primordial things; it seemed to O'Brien that to enter the desert was to go back in time. Here were plants without leaves, misshapen, hoarding their precious moisture in thick, spine-armoured stems, in bitter roots and deep tubers, behind poison thorns. They had become deformed and ugly but they could thrive and reproduce.

Grotesque beings: tarantulas and giant beetles, spiny lizards with horns and armour, leftovers from the age of dragons and giant insects. As one went deeper into the desert the softness of nature vanished, the plants became fewer, armed with spikes and thorns; the insects more virulent; savage baboons watched from their rock castles and the vultures from their vantage points. Time did not matter.

But there were exceptions; the gemsbok had grace and beauty; it was a horselike antelope, fast and noble, the oryx and the unicorn of fable. It could live and grow fat without ever seeing surface water. It was a gentle grazing animal but its long horns were sabrelike and when roused or at bay the lion would back away.

A gemsbok had come to the canyon, remembering perhaps the pool and the strange open water. Desert creatures do not forget forage or water.

It had come to the canyon and O'Brien had shot it.

A strange and wonderful thing: all at once they had a seemingly unlimited supply of meat.

O'Brien had come upon it suddenly close to the water hole in the uncertain light of dawn, a great and beautiful animal standing under one of the withered trees. Its head was turned so that the two arched horns seemed as one. His first shot killed it and it fell heavily on the stony ground.

The others came. They examined the sleek hide, the white legs which reminded them of spats, the overlong horns. Grimmelmann took O'Brien's hunting knife and cut the animal's throat. Fresh blood gushed forth.

"Shall I butcher it?" he asked the big hunter.

"Go ahead," O'Brien told him. "I wouldn't know what to do really. Cut it up."

"Go, bring some wood," the German told Smith. "We're going to have a feast, eat the things that are best eaten while we make biltong."

"Are we going to dry it?" Grace asked.

"It's the safest way," Grimmelmann said. "We can hang the strips in the tree and let the sun work for us. We can keep the fire going. Some of us can remain here overnight with the meat to keep the carrion birds away."

Smith and the others wandered over the flat canyon floor picking up dead branches from under the scattered trees. The sun rose, and vultures came and circled above in the clear sky.

Grimmelmann skinned the big animal and then, with O'Brien's help, butchered it. The entrails were drawn and they began cutting the carcass into large manageable chunks which O'Brien wedged into forks of the nearby acacia trees. The two men were soon drenched with blood and sweat but they were hardly aware of it; they had to put the meat where the blood would drain off.

They stopped and rested and ate, using the hide as a table-top and searching the entrails for titbits, which they roasted over the fire or ate half raw. Grimmelmann smashed the heavy skull and put the brain away for his evening meal.

The meat made them thirsty and they made frequent trips to the pool. They cut steaks and settled down to eat. The frantic gulping, the trembling, the tearing at the raw meat, was behind them. They groaned now, watching the meat curl and sizzle on the ends of their charred sticks. Now and then they would drop a piece and then rush to the pool to wash off the sand. They would finish one piece and cut another; they stuffed themselves and after a time they drew away from the fire and found refuge in the shade, close to the meat.

"What do we do now?" Bain said. He lay like the others on his back, lazy and hot and sleepy. He felt wonderfully bloated.

"We'll cut the meat into slices and let it dry," Grimmelmann said. "We can speed up the process if we squeeze it first between flat stones."

"Dehydrate it," Bain said.

"Yes," the old man agreed. "We let it stand in the sun. One of the big problems will be the flies. Look at them. They are laying eggs in the meat. We must build smaller fires round the carcass, fires with lots of smoke to drive them away."

They moved the fire under the low trees and the smoke drove off large numbers of flies and insects.

Grimmelmann began cutting long thin strips of meat, handing them to the others who hung them carefully from the branches. The sun would dry it, shrink it, suck the moisture from it, and it would become tough and hard. It would not rot. They could save it, hoard it.

They took turns cutting. The scraps were collected and wrapped in the hide, away from the insects, for the night meal. The sun grew weak and they worked on. Bain carried off the bones, scattered them far away downwind from the meat. Flies swarmed after them; the vultures wheeled closer. Then the last long slice of meat hung drying from the tree.

Grimmelmann and O'Brien decided to spend the night under the tree with a small fire; they went back to the cave to get their beds and while they were gone the others tried to find firewood for them.

Evening came. The tree stood in the cooling night festooned with the drying slivers of meat. O'Brien and the old man settled down to rest and keep watch. The others returned to the cave. It was the best day they had seen.

JEFFERSON SMITH took his fountain pen and his diary. He sat down with his back against the rock wall, opened the book and propped it against his upraised legs. The urge to write was an old urge which he understood and welcomed; it was a link with the life before.

He was glad that he had taken his diary from the plane. He wrote, finding it strange, almost difficult. His hands felt large and he had to concentrate to keep the letters small and neat.

The gemsbok meat saved us. Bain is getting stronger now. Told me he was an educated roughneck. Apt.

How long can we stay here? Five of us. O'Brien hunts but gets little. He tries to kill baboons now. They're clever. Stay out of range. I think it is doing something to him. He doesn't talk to us as much as he did. Grimmelmann is fine. He's a wonder at his age. Requires little. Tough. Good outlook. Grace is O.K. I am fine. I wish we could get another gemsbok. Raw meat. We all complain of headaches and dizzy spells. We need salt.

Jefferson Smith, M.A., Ph.D., is barefooted. His pants are now Bermuda-length, ragged. We get dressed at night, all we can wear. Nights are cold. O'Brien wears only filthy old tennis shorts. No shoes. No hat. He has never shaved, cut hair. Says it protects skull from sun, keeps his brain below boiling point when he must be in it. He's right, I suppose. O'Brien brings in most of the small lizards in a bag, all cleaned and ready for the fire. I am the worst hunter here. Grace is better. Outdoor girl. I have a bad eye, no patience. Grimmelmann is owl-like: waits for them to come from hole, sits for an hour, then strikes with his cane. He digs them out from the ground too. O'Brien throws stones at them, hit or miss—he doesn't care.

Civilisation is a membrane stretched over the dark abyss of barbarism. Florid sentence. We've broken through. If this place was bigger, more food, if we all had women, the resulting kids would be born into a Stone Age. O'Brien's gun would use up last bullet, all clothes would wear out. Kids' vocab. would be basic. We might teach them something but after we went it would be meaningless to them (maths., history, philosophy, etc.) and they would not pass it on.

Sitting in the shade at the mouth of the cave, Smith became restless with the speculation, the idle talk. He got up and found his flashlight, discovered that it still worked and stood before Mike Bain and Grace. Grimmelmann was inside the cave resting from his forage in the morning's hot sun. O'Brien had been gone since dawn.

"I'm going to have another look at that kloof, as you call it," Jefferson Smith announced to them. "You want to come? I'm curious about it."

"What's there to see?" Grace asked. "It's just a hole going up through the rock."

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Bain got up. "You going to crawl up it?"

"Yes," Smith said. "There's a bend in it, I think. I want to have a look. I think I can climb it if you hold the light for me."

Bain nodded. "What can we lose?"

"You can fall," Grace said. "Break a leg."

But Smith went and Bain followed him back into the cave. Grace joined them.

Smith's flashlight cut through the blackness of the interior cave; the light at the back of them faded, then vanished as they turned a corner. The sand became deep, softer. They had the feeling they were entering another place far away from the others, a place where they did not belong. And then they came to the end of the cave, to the place where the floor veered upwards, where underfoot were rocks and shale mixed with heavier sand.

They watched the beam of light go up into the wide, chimney-like hole overhead, saw it wander over the jagged sides. The chimney did not go up straight as they had imagined; there was a slight angle to it which only Smith had seemed to notice, an angle which made it climbable.

"See where it veers off?" Smith said. He held the light steady and they saw that far up, the slant became more pronounced; one wall veered over and became a ceiling and the other vanished into the mountain.

"I've been here a couple of times," Smith said. "I got to wondering about where that hole went. We should find out. Remember what Grimmelmann was saying about flash floods? Maybe this thing drains off water when it storms. If it does we'll be in a hell of a fix; we could all be washed out of the cave."

"It's good you thought of it," Bain said.

Smith handed the flashlight to Bain. He walked round the wall and then began to climb, his big hands reaching up and straining on smooth knobs, searching overhead for narrow fingerholds. He was barefooted and the others watched his toes seeking the places that the hands had found and used. He moved upwards and they backed away so that if he fell he would not land on them.

He made it. They saw him stop fifty or sixty feet above them in the rock tunnel. He had climbed easily. After the first twenty-five feet he was in no danger of falling. Bain had followed him with the light, keeping it ahead of him, helping him find his way up the jagged wall. But Smith vanished now without a word into the blackness.

They waited. Bain held the light and wondered what they'd do if it suddenly went out.

And then Smith came out of the hole, feet first, and he began to descend. Within a few minutes he was with them, sitting on the sand, bathed in sweat, laughing to himself.

"I'm going up again with the rope," he said. "I crawled ten feet or so along the tunnel. Couldn't see a damn thing, of course, but it must go somewhere. I'm going up again and I'll toss the rope down and haul the flashlight up and explore the place."

The others were excited with him.

" I'll go back and get the rope," Bain said. " I can walk back in the dark. Why not turn off the light before it wears out? " He was gone.

Smith pushed the button and they were drowned in darkness. Grace shivered next to him. " I'm afraid in the dark," she said. " If I were alone I'd be hysterical."

" This is total darkness," Smith said. " It seems to weigh down on you, press down. I didn't feel any air movement up there but it's difficult to tell. I'm willing to bet there's a backdoor to this cave. I bet the Bushmen used it."

" I'm afraid of Bushmen too," Grace said. " I dream that they'll come here and watch us from the cliff and then in the night come down and kill us."

" I hope they do come," Smith said. " They wouldn't harm us. They're not wild men or savages, remember that. I think they'd help us get out of here, help us get across the desert. I'd go with them; I hope they do come."

Noises in the darkness came towards them.

Smith turned on the flashlight and they saw Mike Bain with the coil of rope.

Smith took the rope, made a loop in one end and tied the rope round his waist. " I might be able to tie it up there," he told them. He went to the wall and began to climb, faster this time with Bain lighting the way with the flashlight. He reached the top of the kloof and halted at the horizontal tunnel.

" You want to come up, Bain? " he shouted down. " There's an elbow of stone up here. I can make a few turns round it with the rope and hold it too. What about it? "

Bain didn't want to go. It was pointless, and he wasn't agile or confident of himself. But Smith seemed to want him to come.

" I'll come up," he shouted. He found the rope and tugged on it.

" It's safe," Smith said from above in the darkness. Grace held the light and Bain climbed slowly upwards, pushing against the rock with his bare feet, leaning out above them, moving up the rope hand over hand. He reached Smith, and Grace Monckton let out a sigh of relief.

" Tie the flashlight on the end of the rope now," Smith called down. Grace did and called back that it was ready. They watched it bob upwards in the blackness, swaying and throwing an eerie light, showing her up-turned face, strained, taut.

Mike Bain followed Smith down the tunnel, holding the flashlight so that the man in front of him could see. The tunnel sloped upwards and became larger until the two men walked upright. The stone closed round them and they walked on, wordless and awed by the sense of discovery.

The floor tilted at a sharper angle and the tunnel narrowed. Smith took the flashlight and went on and Bain followed as close as possible. The stone round them and underfoot was a deep dull obsidian black, smooth and glasslike; they began reaching out

and touching the sides of the tunnel. The ceiling suddenly went up and Smith stopped for a moment and explored it with the beam of light, and they saw that far above them the walls of the tunnel closed.

And all at once the slope ended and the floor underfoot flattened out and they stood in a wide corridor. The ceiling was even higher here; the light did not find it as Smith raised it up and up over the tapered side of the fissure.

The light came down and they went on. Smith stopped suddenly and Bain bumped into him. Smith grunted and Bain saw a skeleton curled up against the side of the passage.

"Bushman," Smith said. "Look at the size of it."

They went to it and bent down and studied the small skull and the time-worn bones. The remains of a tiny bow were near it, and four arrows from which the stone heads had long since dropped. Bain touched the wood and it crumbled.

"Don't touch the arrowheads," Smith warned. "They were probably covered with poison once and it's supposed to be one of the most powerful in the world. It might still be dangerous."

Bain nodded and they stood up and went on. They came to another skeleton and then two more beyond.

They knelt by the last two skeletons and examined them. One was obviously a child and the other a woman. Smith picked up a few beads: ostrich shell, uniform, and perfectly made. And there were the powdery remains of the clothes they had worn. Why had four Bushmen died here so long ago?

Near the smallest skeleton were a tiny bow and a few arrows the size of pencils, curls and mounds of leather. Smith touched one of them and the ashlike decay crumbled.

The flashlight blinked and for an instant they were alone in the darkness. It frightened them.

"Let's go on," Smith said. Bain felt the excitement in his voice.

They moved on, away from the skeletons, down the black tunnel. Smith pointed the light upwards and they saw that the ceiling was still out of its range.

Something white ahead. More bones perhaps. They went on without speaking. The white objects were giant eggshells. A neat pile of them against the black stone. Some were broken. Smith stopped, reached out for Bain's arm.

"Ostrich eggs," he said quietly. "There must be twenty or thirty of them." He reached down, picked one up, hefted it, handed it to Bain. "The Bushmen use them as water containers."

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" Bain asked. The shell was rubbery-hard with a small hole in each end.

"We can go out into the desert now," Smith said. "These might save us."

"Let's get back to Grace," Bain said. "I'll carry a couple of them with me."

Jefferson Smith nodded, played the flashlight over the pile of dirty white shells. "Be careful. Don't break any."

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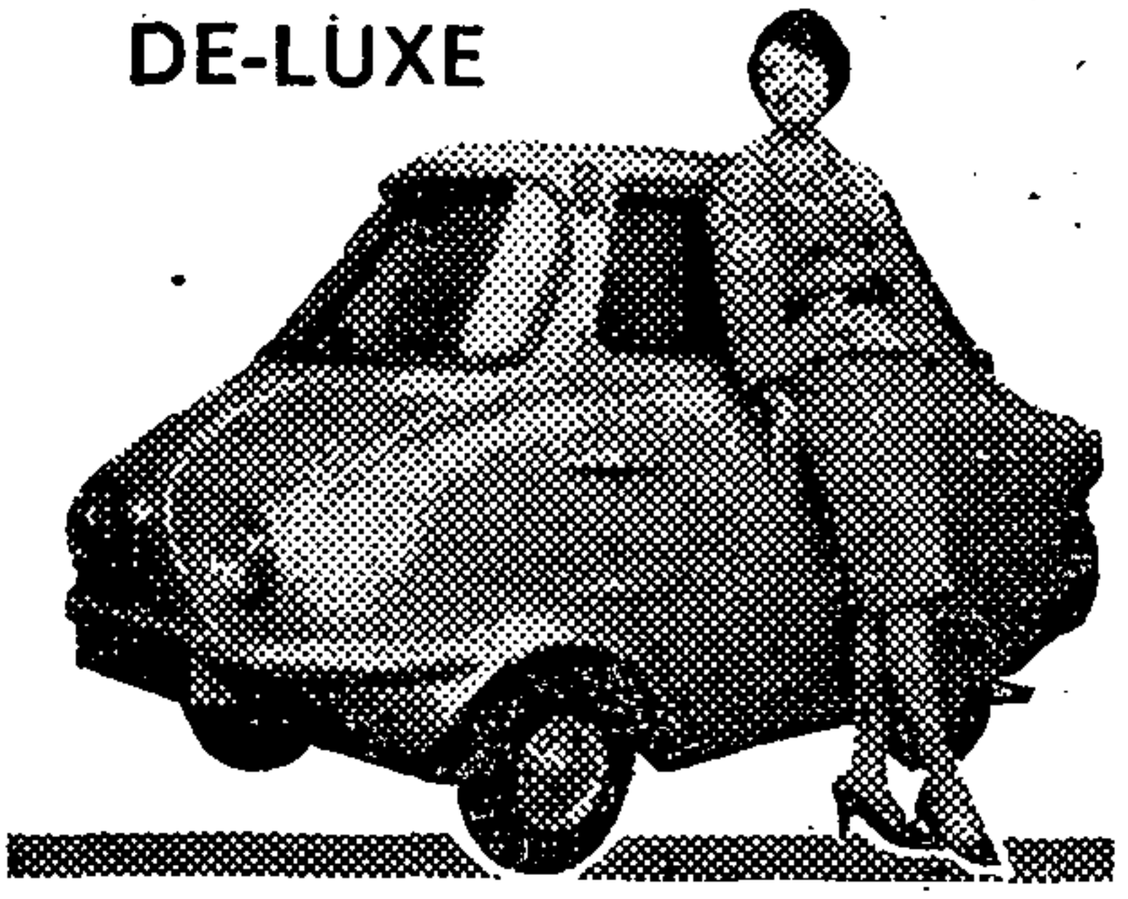

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They worked their way back down the tunnel, Bain first, now walking in the path of Smith's flashlight.

O'Brien came back from hunting as the sun went down. He was tired and short-tempered, flushed from the sun, with nothing to show for hours of tense waiting and stalking. They ate melons and some of the dried gemsbok meat and talked again of the ostrich shells Smith and Mike Bain had found in the kloof.

"We could create water stations," Grimmelmann said. "I should not speak, really, for I would not be able to walk so far as would be necessary. In any case, with so many shells it would seem possible."

"How would we do it?" O'Brien asked with sudden interest.

"We have plenty of water and plenty of shells and nothing else to do except wait for a plane to fly over and see us. Let us say that Bain here and Smith walked off into the sand with all the water they could carry in the shells. They walk all night. When they can no longer go on they stop and Bain buries his load where it can be found again. The next night they go on and do the same thing with the remaining water. They come back leaving two water points in the desert. They rest for a few days and regain their strength. They set off again with more water but now they can walk for two days without depleting the supply they carry; they drink from the two stations they created. They walk on and set up two more stations, the last four days from here. Eventually they would have a line of stations across the desert and there would come a time when one man could set off with no water weighing him down and walk for days finding, let us say, two shells of water and food too perhaps at the end of each night's march."

"It sounds possible," O'Brien said.

"With these shells," Grimmelmann said, "it's possible to explore the area around us. We might very well find another permanent source of water or a road. There is no point in anyone walking off the way Sturdevant did. None of us has the right to ask anyone else to do that."

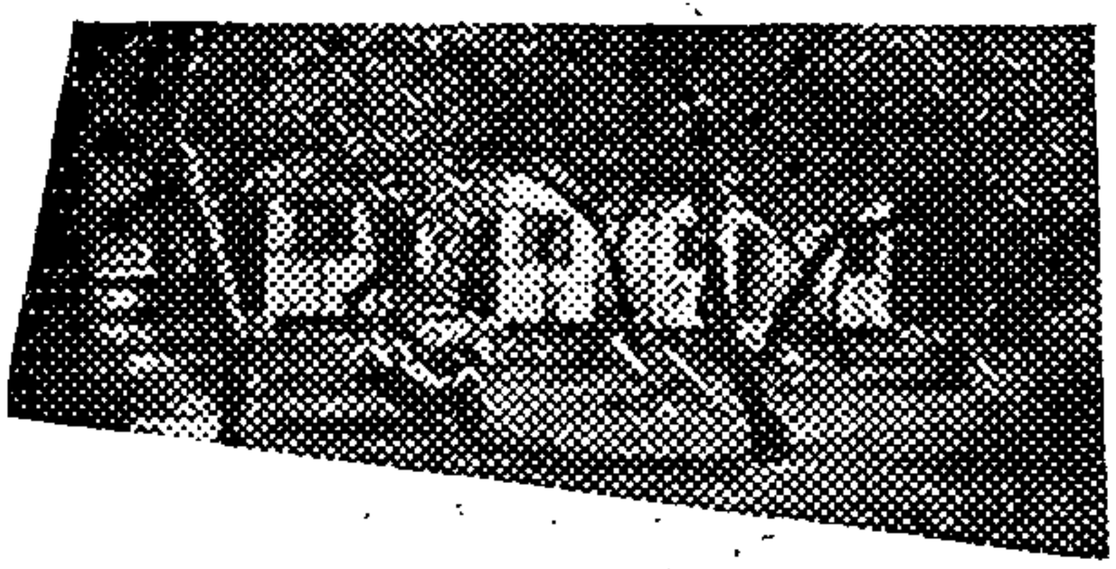
"I agree with that," Bain said. "No heroics. If Sturdevant didn't make it none of us can. Let's use the shells to set up water stations for the purpose of searching the area, not to send somebody out there in the hope that he will find help before he dies of thirst. Unless that is agreed upon I will not help."

"You are right, of course," Grimmelmann said. "I was only speculating on the uses the shells could be put to. We might well be two or three days' walk from a small town, closer perhaps. I think we shall soon be out of here."

"I can't believe it," Grace said. "It seems as if I've been here half of my life."

"You have," O'Brien said. "From the standpoint of your emotions and experiences." He spoke slowly and carefully and the others looked up and nodded vaguely.

"We are more *alive* here," O'Brien said. "There are the basic elements around us. The sun, the air, the darkness of the night



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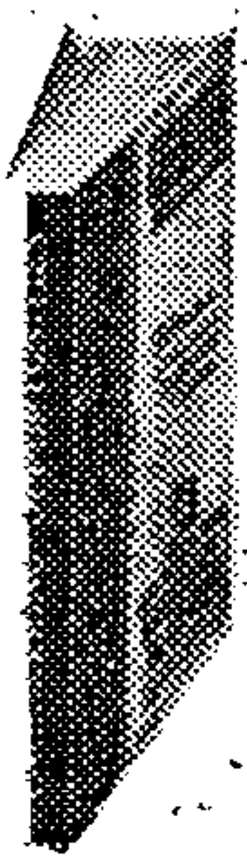

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and the heat shimmering over the rocks at noon. We live because we are so close to death; we are all more real here than outside."

Smith nodded and looked at Bain. Grimmelmann understood and smiled to himself as if someone had discovered something in him that he had not known.

"That's the trouble," Bain said. "We're too damn close to nature." But he understood too, for he'd spent half of his life apart from the mainstream of civilisation. And Smith knew the feel of time about you in the lonely canyons.

Grimmelmann had found a spearhead buried in the sand of their cave floor; seven inches long, narrow and balanced, chipped from a heavy black flint. He held it in his hand now, studied the honed edges, the clever groove that some Bushman or Herero craftsman had fashioned to hold its wooden shaft. It was an artifact, old, an elemental tool.

He showed the spearhead to the others and they all agreed that it was a rare thing of great beauty.

Grace turned to O'Brien. "What do you think about using the ostrich shells?" she asked.

"We have no choice," the big hunter said. "It seems to me it would only be a matter of time before we hit something. Go out two or three days in all directions. Two guys carrying all the water they could in the shells leaving two behind every six hours or so. Only one thing: be sure we put the shells where we can find them."

"The desert is not really featureless," Grimmelmann said. "Once past this sand desert the country would change, that I am sure of. It will be just as dry but with trees and some grass and you would find landmarks to go by."

"We can start tomorrow evening," O'Brien said. "I'll go with one of you guys." He turned to Smith and Bain.

"I'll go with you," Smith said.

"O.K.," O'Brien said. "Maybe I can come back with fresh meat. If nothing else, this will widen our foraging area."

"Take a bag for melons," Grimmelmann said.

"And build a big fire every day," Grace said. "Lots of smoke."

Suddenly they were all alert and expectant. Smith had chanced upon the cache of ostrich eggs and they were going to expand their world. They were going to be saved.

Entry in the diary of Jefferson Smith.

> The desert is a place beyond description. The real desert where there is only the great dry earth, the sky and the terrible sun. It is so alien to me, to most men. We have always shunned such places as we have shunned mountain peaks, caves, the depths of the sea. . . Strange that we were so late in conquering these places. We had television and A-bomb before Everest was scaled. Stone Age people in Brazil stand in ruins of lost city and watch Sputnik. This part of the world seems as remote as the far side of the moon.

O'Brien is magnificent. I cannot picture him outside this place. He keeps us all on the ball, fighting. We might all be gone if it were not for him.

Bain seems better since before we left. He made a net from all manner of string and wire. Catches birds with it somehow near the pool. Not bad. Is working on lizard trap.

Grimmelmann and Grace Monckton are thin as we all are. Hanging on. I suppose we are all in a state of slow starvation.

O'BRIEN and Smith went into the desert again. They took one melon apiece, hoping that they would find new patches of them in the wasteland beyond the horizon. They carried enough water to last them six days.

"Don't take chances," Grace said.

"If I shoot anything we'll bring it right back," O'Brien told them.

They left, and after a while the sun went down and the night breeze came. They headed south and after six hours they each took a water-filled eggshell from their pack. O'Brien dug a hole in the sand while Smith searched for stones to make a cairn. They buried the precious shells and rested for half an hour. Then they got up and walked on, hurrying before the sun came to halt them.

On the third night they came to another variety of terrain. Bushveld. Dry powdered soil filled with sharp pebbles and a billion half-dead bushes. When dawn came they did not stop but continued on, for they were excited. The monotony of the sand depressed them; the bush seemed to promise something. An hour later O'Brien shot a bustard and they stopped, putting their remaining eggshells in the shade to cool the water. They built a huge fire and cooked the big bird; then they settled down in the shade and slept through the heat, feeling strengthened and revived by the turkeylike meat.

The sun waned. Smith got up.

"Let's get an early start. We can take the rest of the bird."

O'Brien got up and rubbed the sleep from his eyes. They ate some of the bird and drank deeply from one of the shells. Smith picked up his netlike pack with the shells in it.

"Do me a favour for a little while," O'Brien said. "Carry my water."

"O.K.," Smith said. "You take the bird."

O'Brien carefully took his five remaining ostrich shells and put them in with Smith's. He made the whole pack tight with an old belt so they would not jostle each other and break.

"How does it feel?" he asked Smith.

"Good."

O'Brien picked up his rifle. He walked back a few yards and then snapped a shell into the breech.

"Keep still a minute now," he told Smith. "I want to say something to you." Smith frowned but he went on.

" You're going ahead with all the water. I'm going back alone. I'll use the water at the stations and I might be lucky and shoot something and bring it back to the others. They're starving to death back there. They need meat."

" I'm not going to do it," Smith said.

" You are."

" No," Smith said. " When these shells are empty I'm done for. We decided against this the first time we talked about it."

" You'll go or I'll kill you right here," O'Brien said.

" I don't believe you," Smith said.

" Try me. Come at me now. Try to take this gun."

Smith looked at him and knew he wasn't fooling. "This is pointless," he said. " We have enough water to go on together and come back together."

" You miss the main point," O'Brien said. " There are too many of us back in the canyon. With you gone there will be one less belly to fill. And I really think you can make it to water or to a railway or a ranch. Keep your wits about you now. Build a big fire whenever you stop."

" I might circle in at the back of you and beat you to the water stations and leave you out here with nothing," Smith said.

O'Brien laughed. The idea of Smith outwitting him and outrunning him amused him. " Let's not get silly, Professor, shall we? "

" Don't be too sure," Smith said.

" Keep in a straight line," O'Brien cautioned. " You've got a good chance. Don't quit on us now. Think of them back in that canyon."

Smith pleaded. " Don't do this to me, O'Brien. I found these ostrich shells. I can't last long without you. This bird we ate. You shot it. What can I kill with my bare hands? "

" Look for melons," O'Brien said.

" Don't do this," Smith said.

" Too many people to feed," O'Brien said. " It's best all round. In the end we might all die but this way gives us the best chance."

" But what gives you the right to decide? " Smith asked. " The gun? "

O'Brien nodded calmly. " The gun. The gun and the ability to kill with it. If I find you following me back I'll shoot you. I don't want you back in that canyon."

" I have a feeling that you're planning to kill all of them there," Smith said.

" I'll kill you if you don't go," O'Brien said. " I told you that once."

Smith looked up, saw the rifle, the face, the eyes.

O'Brien brought up the rifle until it pointed at the centre of Smith's chest. . .

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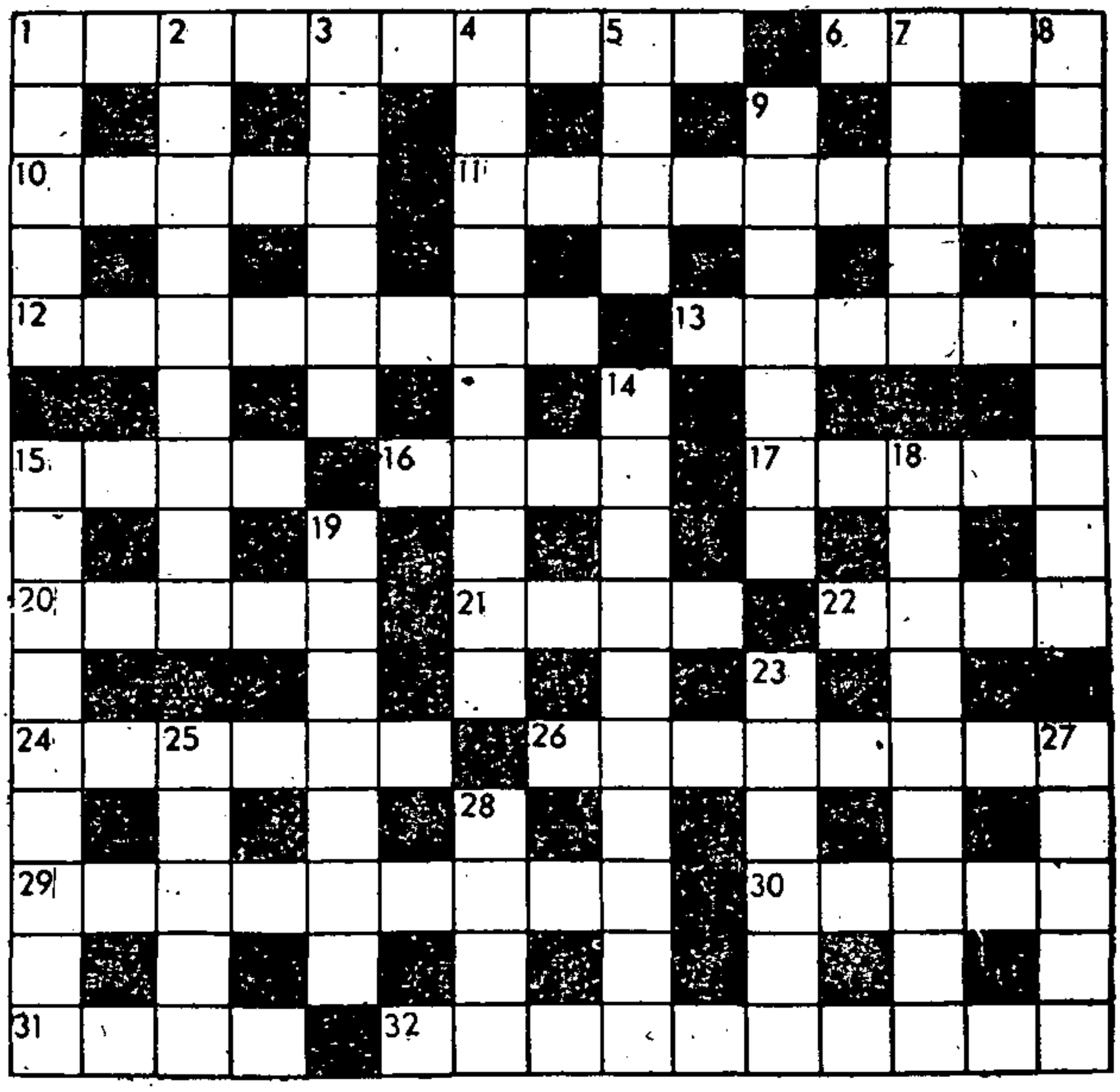
★ ***The last part of The Sands of Kalahari by William Mulvihill appears next month***

ARGOSY CROSS-WORD



★

Solution on Page 111

★

CLUES

Across

1 O my raisins for a preacher (10).

6 Deity is doubled (4).

10 TV game players sound bored (5).

11 Disc jockey's equipment—or medium's? (9).

12 To whom bad pennies return (2-6).

13 Puff round about relative (6).

15 Nips back like 11 (4).

16 Player performs five if it's Shakespeare (4).

17 Talking-point for top readers? (5).

20 Precise with most of 16 (5).

21 Or little by little (4).

22 Genuine Scots dance? (4).

24 Say again about the fuel (6).

26 I'd make him an abstainer from food (8).

29 Balkan sweet? (9).

30 No war disturbs this ash (5).

31 Cyrano's? (4).

32 Double repeat (5, 5).

Down

1 Canadian leaf puts French on the map (5).

2 Sonia can't mix wormwood (9).

3 "Our rough —— story" (Tennyson) (6).

4 Unsporting soccer? (3, 7).

5 Uncommonly red steak? (4).

7 This sword bears shaking (5).

8 Dubious, but the end sounds laughable (9).

9 Narrow channels might be distressing (7).

14 Man's tinges turn to task (10).

15 Cowboy pilot ? (9).

18 Elegant humour (6, 3).

19 Part of rope runs aground (7).

23 "Say I —— Caesar, honoured him . . ." (Shakespeare) (6).

25 Plectra down the coal mine ? (5).

27 Music in moron doggerel (5).

28 Hullo with outrage sounds like best sound (2-2).

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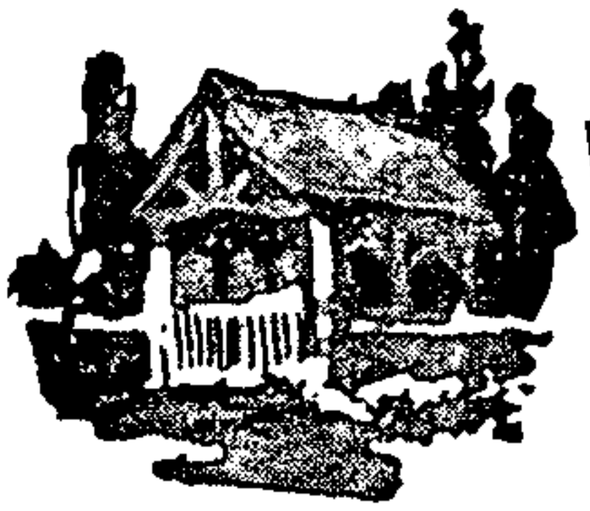

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